The California Sunday Magazine

ESCAPE

What do you wish you could escape?

Think about it for a minute. Maybe it's the news — and that appalled, exhausted feeling a lot of us have when we look at our phones in the morning. Or your surroundings. Maybe it's a prison cell or a climate crisis. Maybe it's a job. Or a relationship.

Escape has been on our minds this year. We started seeing stories of escape all around us. So we dedicated a whole issue to the theme — escapes big and small, literal and figurative, terrifying and exhilarating and mundane. We also teamed up with our colleagues at *Pop-Up Magazine*, our "live magazine," to create a traveling, theatrical escape issue. We're bringing the show to grand, historic venues in the U.S. and Canada. You can find cities and dates below and get tickets at popupmagazine.com.

This issue unfolds in three chapters. First, escaping the past. Then, escaping the present. And finally, escaping the future. So, what do you wish you could escape?

Doug

EDITOR IN CHIEF

→

I took this job to ease the burden off my dad, but he still prefers my brothers. Two years ago, I downloaded Kuaishou, a video-sharing platform and started posting videos of me working. I drive alone, but I find people during my shift — people buying vegetables, for example — to help me record. Nobody in my family ever says, "You worked hard," but on Kuaishou, my followers tell me, "It's hot out there. Drink more water," or "Little Sister Liu is the best." Even if their words are fake, I'm happy because I know there are people out there who care about me.

LIU HONGSHAN, 30, PRODUCE TRUCK DRIVER, SHANGHAI

COVER PHOTOGRAPHS BY PENG KE

ESCAPE ISSUE TOUR

September 20
San Francisco
Sydney Goldstein Theater

September 21
Oakland
Paramount Theatre

September 23
San Diego
Observatory North Park

September 26
Los Angeles
Theatre at Ace Hotel

September 28
Vancouver, B.C.
Vogue Theatre

October 7
Washington, D.C.
Lincoln Theatre

October 10
New York City
David Geffen Hall, Lincoln Center

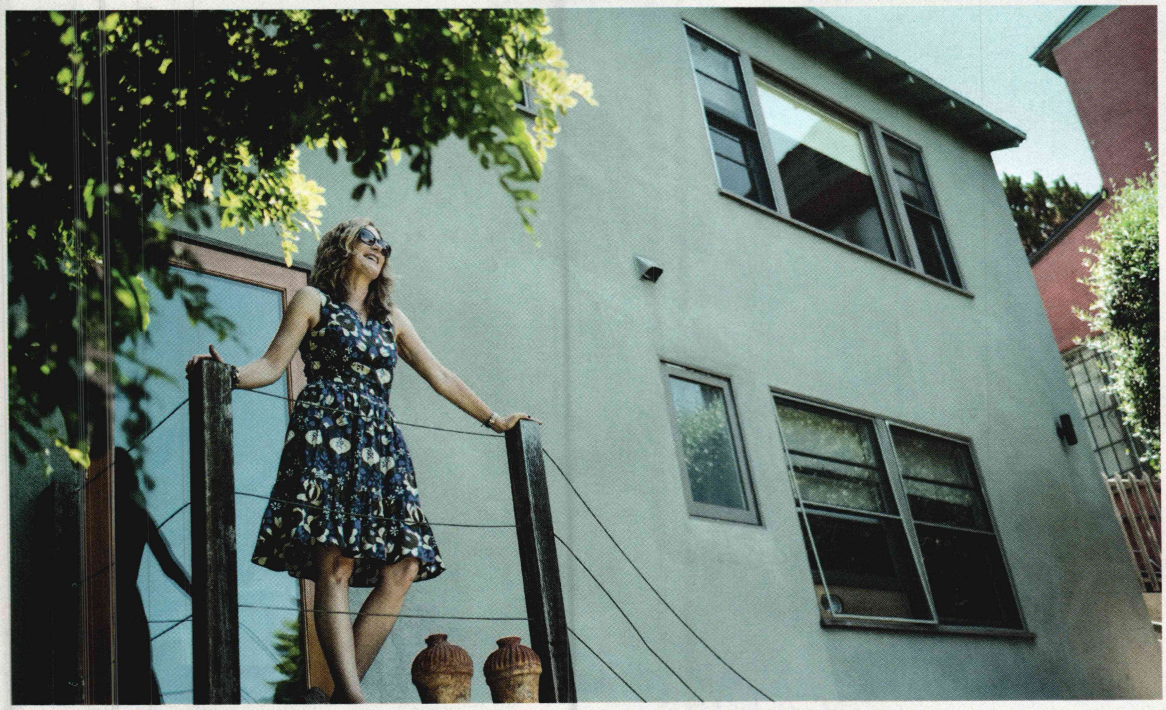
October 12
Chicago
Athenaeum Theatre

The California Sunday Magazine is produced by Pop-Up Magazine Productions and distributed to select areas through paid agreements with major daily newspapers. We're big fans of the newspapers (their reporters, editors, etc.), but they are not involved in creating the magazine. Learn more at californiasunday.com.


临沂
奥铃捷运

To live and thrive in L.A.

As rent and home prices rise, working professionals are finding ways to battle the increasing cost of living in Los Angeles. Award–winning documentarian, TV producer, and printmaker Shannon O'Rourke found an unexpected solution: short-term vacation rentals.



When Shannon O'Rourke bought and renovated her Los Feliz home in 2010, she never intended to rent it to traveling guests. That idea came in 2016 when a friend suggested it. "Because I work out of town so much, it just made perfect sense. After renting out my house for a couple of months, I fell in love with the idea of short-term rentals."

It was an experiment-turned-newfound-passion for O'Rourke, who says hosting is ingrained in her DNA. "I really enjoy meeting the people that come from far and wide. I guess because I'm a documentary filmmaker and I love telling people's stories." Her guests come from all walks of life — tourists wanting a comforting getaway, families looking to reconnect, locals (and one hush-hush celebrity) seeking staycations and quiet work retreats. Many are repeat customers, and O'Rourke now counts a few as friends.

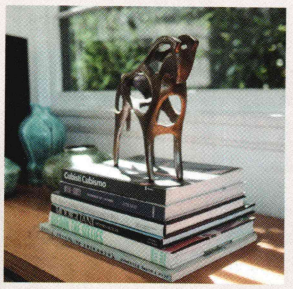
A typical stay at O'Rourke's home is a testament to her dedication: On arrival, she greets guests and offers a tour. She brings in freshly arranged

> “I would have to leave L.A. if I couldn't rent out my house.”

flowers and makes sure the fridge is stocked with her guests' favorite breakfast fare. O'Rourke truly loves the work, and travelers appreciate the personalized, extra touches she provides. “Whenever people are happy because they're in my home, then I'm happier. It's just nice that someone can stay here and pay less than they would for a tiny hotel room.”

O'Rourke is discerning about who she welcomes into her home, and says her neighbors, most of whom are working creatives like herself, support her burgeoning business. “I'm very hands-on. I've met every single person who's stayed in my home. That's important to me.”

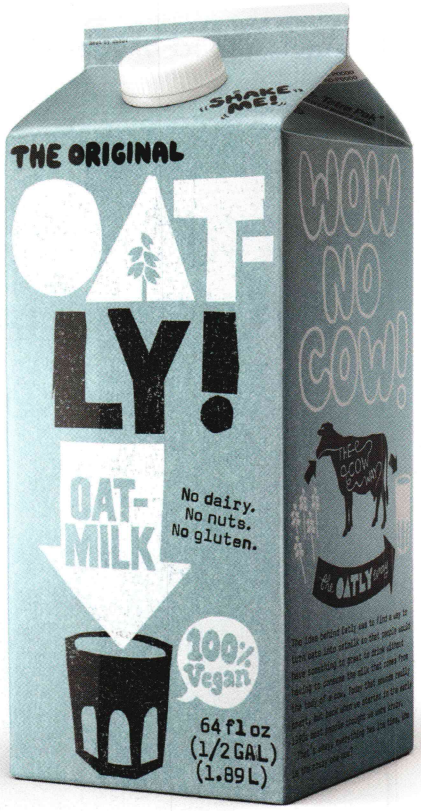
She now rents her home throughout the year in accordance with local home-sharing regulations. When she's on location, O'Rourke employs a caretaker to oversee things. The rental earnings supplement her freelance work and help pay the mortgage on a single income, no small feat in a city where rent and housing are at an all-time high. “Doing short-term rentals allows me to stay here. I would have to leave L.A. if I couldn't rent out my house,” she says.



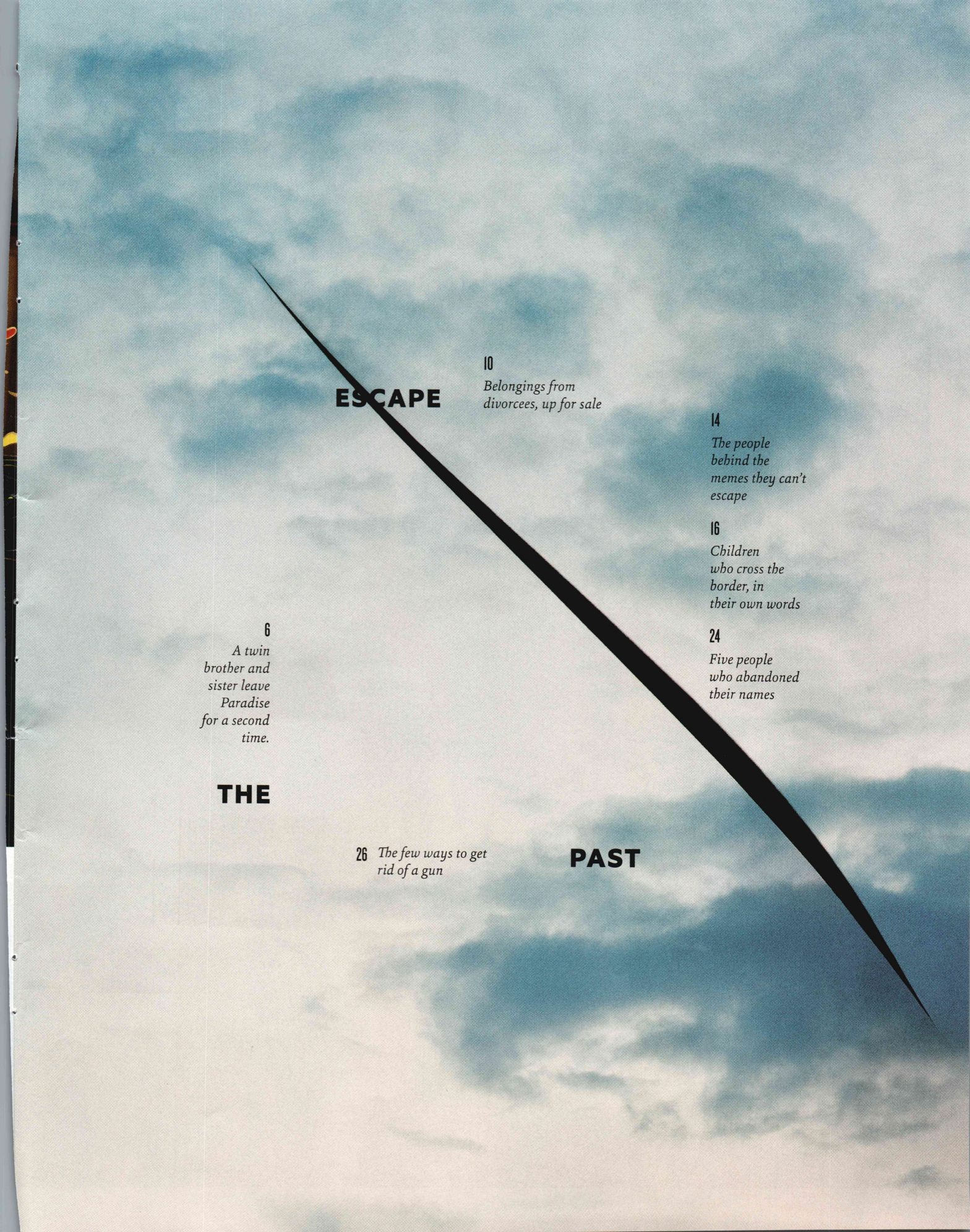
At her hillside home in Los Feliz, O'Rourke has created a magical sanctuary with plenty of personality. Her home features sweeping views from the backyard garden and is decorated with O'Rourke's own original artwork.

Beyond her personal motivations, O'Rourke sees the bigger picture rentals like hers play by bringing visitors — and their money — to the local economy. She's a homegrown advocate for the city where she lives and works. “When guests come to L.A. and stay at my house, they go to local restaurants, they go to tourist attractions, they shop in local stores. I'm helping my community and my neighborhood.”

We made this product specifically for vegans and non-vegans and for normally-not-vegan-but-sometimes-flexi-veggie-person-tarians.



If you happen to be any of the above then our nonexistent target group analysis report says that you just might be the right person for this product. Congratulations to you and this product for finally finding each other. Perhaps it was always meant to be.



“Grab it and

A twin brother and sister leave Paradise for a second time.

go."

By Byard Duncan

Photographs by Chanell Stone

The first time that Nicholas and Kirsten-Grace Baker moved away from Paradise, California, they did so with approximately 35 minutes' notice. On the morning of November 8, 2018, Nicholas rolled out of bed, took a shower, and noticed that his family's entire back deck was coated with an inch of ash. A mile away, Kirsten-Grace, his twin sister, arrived at school and discovered that only three of her first-period classmates had shown up. As she sped back home, the sky turned lava red, and she noticed hundreds of cars crawling through evacuation traffic pointed in the opposite direction. "I'm driving right into the apocalypse," she said out loud, to no one in particular.

At home, the family grabbed everything their circumstances allowed. Cats and clothes and photos and stuffed animals and books and old chests full of trinkets rendered suddenly priceless. Because Kirsten-Grace was always logical — "the brainiac," Nicholas calls her — she approached the situation with tidy practicality. "I had a jewelry case, and I thought, *I can't just grab all of these necklaces*," she says. "*They're all gonna get tangled up with each other.*" She took three and left the rest to burn. Nicholas tore through his bedroom in an unsuccessful search for his childhood security blanket. The Bakers pushed their four cars into traffic and left home for good.

For several weeks after the fire, they stayed with a friend in nearby Bangor. Then they moved to a student apartment near Chico State with one vinyl couch and sterile white walls. Often, they invoked a passage from the Book of Jeremiah: "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Nicholas got it engraved on a dog tag. They also used another, punchier catch phrase, something they could mutter to each other every time they went back into the nightmarish melt that had once been their Paradise: "Stupid Fire."

The Stupid Fire erased their home and darkened their moods. Among survivors, the Stupid Fire hijacked typical greetings — "Hello" or "How are you?" — and plugged in something more somber and philosophical: "Where are you now?" Nicholas believes the Stupid Fire had something to do with why his father asked his mother, Karla, for a divorce around Thanksgiving. It placed emotional booby traps around things the family had once considered mundane: They sobbed, suddenly and without warning, at movies; the grocery store, with its neat rows of vegetables and cheeses, became too much to handle.

"To get to the spice aisle, I had to walk by everything that I lost," Karla says. "I've lost this pan. I've lost the cookie cutter. Oh my gosh, I've lost the recipes. It's not just your kitchen, your house. It's those itty-bitty tangible items." →

← From left: Kirsten-Grace, Nicholas, and Karla Baker near the lot where their house once stood

↑ Kirsten-Grace in her dorm room at Westmont College in Santa Barbara

Among survivors, the Stupid Fire hijacked typical greetings — "Hello" or "How are you?" — a

Donations helped. But charity, even with the best intentions, is often clumsy in practice. The Bakers were given more clothes and toothbrushes than they ever could use. They had access to a seemingly endless supply of Q-tips. Meanwhile, other essential items, such as coat hangers and garbage cans, were nearly impossible to find. One afternoon, when Karla went to a Target store in Chico to buy underwear, she found a stack of near-empty shelves. "Good-hearted Samaritans were buying the underwear and then giving them to people," she says. "But if you wanted to go buy your own underwear, you couldn't."

Finishing their senior year of high school, the twins looked for order wherever it was available. Kirsten-Grace filled her time with AP classes and the yo-yo club. Even though Paradise High School wasn't significantly damaged, officials were forced to rent an office building near Chico's airport to use as a replacement campus. Classrooms at "The Fortress," as students came to call it, were separated by thin, 6-foot-high dividers. Depending on the location, they could sometimes see the heads of the taller teachers bobbing back and forth as they taught. "We all had permission from our teachers to listen to music during tests just to drown out the noise, because there was talking everywhere," Kirsten-Grace says.

Nicholas, who is 6-foot-5, found relief in his final year on the Paradise High School basketball team. More than ever, the game's consistency was a comfort: Its rules and routines hadn't burned up in the fire. He often texted his coaches, asking them to unlock a gym for him — just him — on evenings and weekends.

Yet the Stupid Fire was nothing if not persistent. "We had games where we were, quote, 'the home team,'" Nicholas says. "But we never played at Paradise. For us, it was always an away game." Nathan Johnson, one of his coaches, recalls a practice over the winter in which he asked the roughly 18 players on the team to work

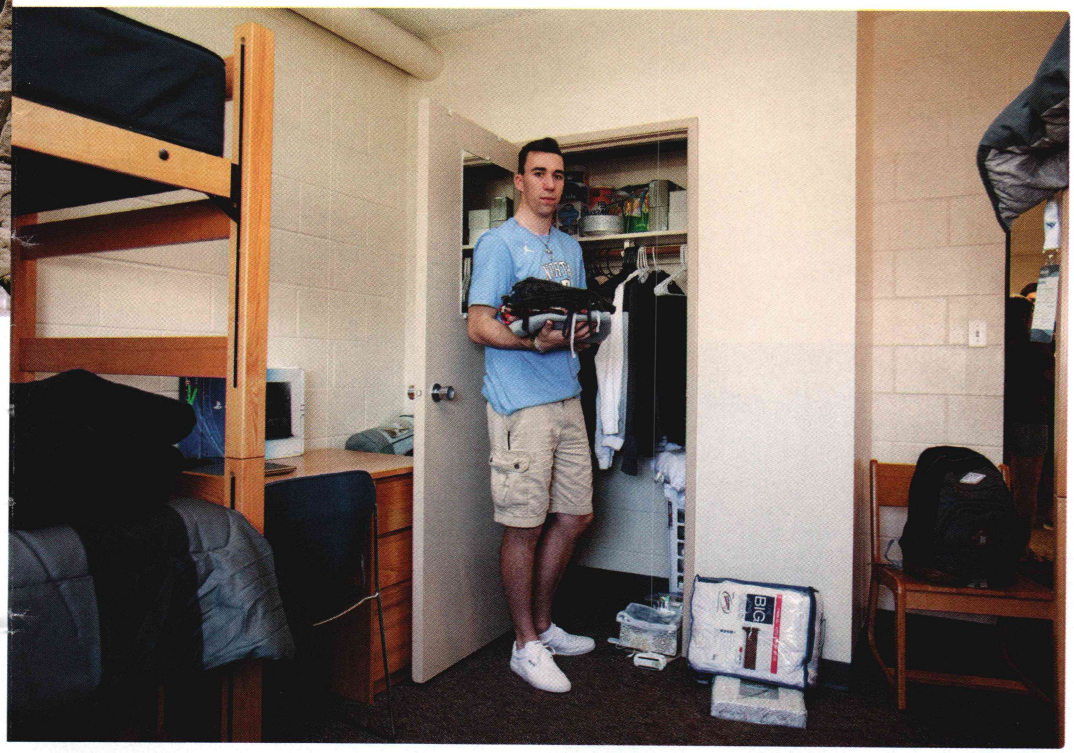
and plugged in something more somber and philosophical: "Where are you now?"

on free throws. The drill lasted a few minutes; afterward, Johnson walked around the gym to ask how it went.

"Kids were horrible with free throws," he says. "I go, 'How many guys last summer had a basketball hoop within a hundred yards of their house that they could practice on?' They all raised their hands. I said, 'How many do now?' One kid raised his hand."

The second time that Nicholas and Kirsten-Grace moved away from Paradise, it was on a hot night in late August. They had driven in two cars from Castro Valley, a Bay Area suburb where they'd been staying for about a month. The idea was to say goodbye before heading off to college later that week. Karla and Kirsten-Grace rode together; Nicholas came alone because, sometimes, when he enters the town, the emotions hit him like a sucker punch.

The dirt lots that used to be the Bakers' neighborhood run up and down Bonnie Lane, not far from what's left of the town's main drag. The rubble and ash that were once their home was bulldozed several months ago, and their next-door neighbor, who worked for decades as a linesman for PG&E, moved with his wife to Arizona. Meanwhile, a family across the street is eagerly rebuilding. On a hill behind the Bakers' property, beyond what used to be a dense line of evergreens, there's a small community of people dry-camping in RVs. Up and down the block, some residents have coated their land with a stiff layer of mulch designed to slow erosion.



Nicholas in his dorm room at Vanguard University in Costa Mesa ↓

Growing up, Kirsten-Grace used to love watching surgeries on television, as Nicholas, who is petrified of needles, cowered elsewhere. She appreciated the process, the precision, the certainty. But here in Paradise, standing in a patch of dirt that used to be her bedroom's reading nook, she finds the rebuilding disconcerting. "It's like seeing something half-done, and I want it to either get done or stop."

The twins both knew they'd leave Paradise someday. Nicholas, who as an adolescent had developed a reputation as a loudmouth, hated how that label stuck to him like a stain. "I was obnoxious," he says. "And that didn't help me growing up." Kirsten-Grace, despite being named Missette Butte County, Miss Teen Butte County, and Miss Butte County, wanted something bigger.

Their dorm rooms, at Westmont College and Vanguard University, both feel like blank slates: white cinder blocks, heavy doors, cheap desks. Nicholas is playing basketball and planning to get a bachelor's degree in kinesiology at Vanguard. He likes thinking about how the body's muscles fit together, how certain things affect other things: "When one's off," he says, "it affects the rest of them."

Kirsten-Grace is entering Westmont's pre-health program and has already landed an on-campus gig as a statistician for several of the college's sports teams. Her job is basically to watch games and use numbers to make sense of their chaos. She thinks she's going to be good at it.

This time around, they both had ample time to pack. Nicholas isn't bringing much stuff, because stuff doesn't really mean much to him anymore. Kirsten-Grace, on the other hand, planned extensively. She split her most-prized possessions — artwork from a friend, a board where she collects stickers — into two piles. She's bringing one to Santa Barbara and leaving the other as a sort of backup in Castro Valley. She's doing this "because clothes can be replaced. It's the other stuff that you really get upset about if something were to happen."

Under her dorm-room bed, she keeps a clear tub with a pinkish lid. Inside is her college paperwork and her passport "and anything important that I need to bring with me," she says. Each night before going to sleep, she drops in her wallet and student ID. If something happens, "and I have time to grab it, I just grab it and go."

“I didn’t want

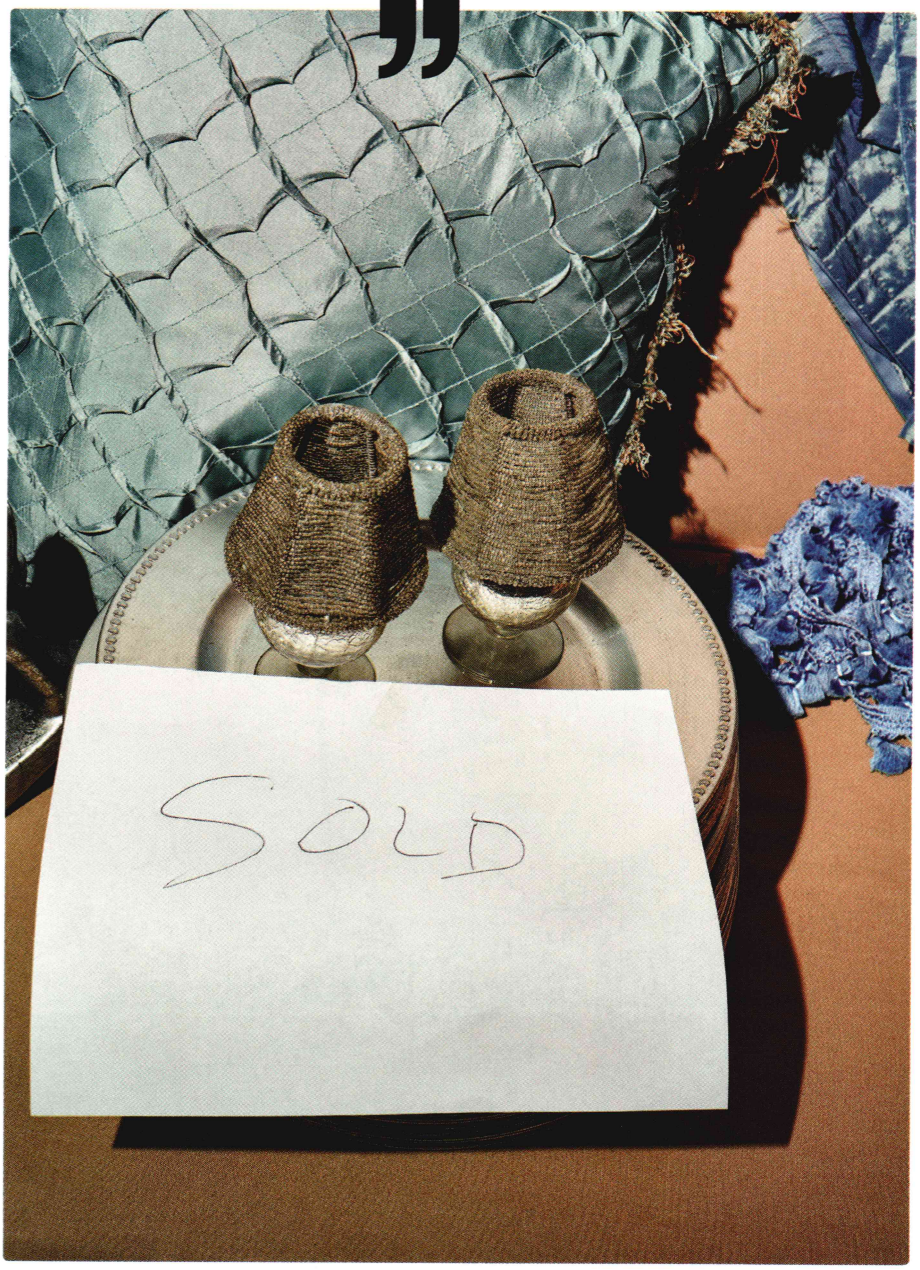
Photographs by Michelle Groskopf

Text by Tasbeeh Herwees

Around the time that Eric’s marriage of 18 years came to an end, he walked into his home in Santa Ana, California, to find all of his belongings packed in boxes. “It was an existential experience,” he says. “Things that were very precious to me, heirlooms that I wanted for my children — they were just completely disregarded.” As Eric began to sort through his stuff, he had a realization: “The more things you give up, the more you can let go of spending your life looking after them.” So each day, he would sell a few objects. “Today I sold some Boy Scout paraphernalia and a teapot.... I didn’t want any memory of my old life.”

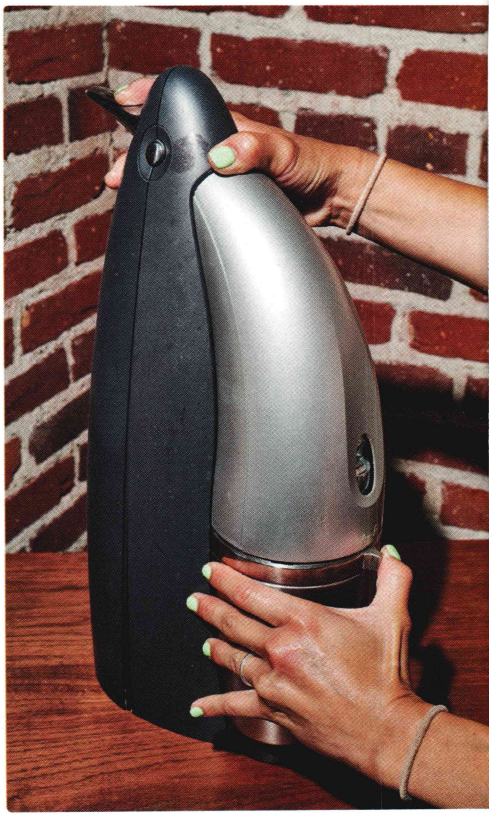
Divorcees, like Eric, part with the physical remnants of their former relationships, selling them off piece by piece on Craigslist and divorce-themed garage sales. They sometimes offer brief histories, informing would-be customers why they’re letting go. →

any memory of my old life.”

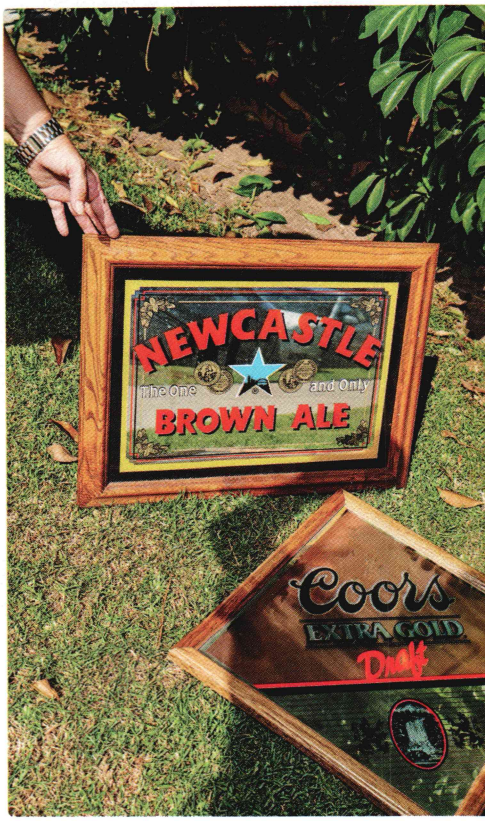


One of the many items that Terri is getting rid of in the aftermath of her 23-year marriage (*above*). “I’m selling a lifetime’s worth of stuff. I need the money so I’m capable of buying *my* things.” The cigar humidor (*center*) and the rack of shirts (*left*) belong to Eric, who used to live in an English Tudor home with his ex-wife. “I had a house like a museum,” he says. “It had a smoking room, and I had three humidors in there. I’m finding people to take these things, and it’s giving me closure.”

→ Vivi's divorce went relatively smoothly. "I was impressed with how easy it was to do the whole thing," she says. "My ex-husband is really organized, so he carefully isolated my items and shipped them to me, and that was it." But there was one item they both coveted: the SodaStream. "I had actually bought my own by then," says Vivi. "But I knew he really liked his, so when we were meeting to finalize the divorce papers, I said, 'I won't sign unless you give me your SodaStream.' He said, 'That's a dick move.' I'm now selling his because I have two."



↑ Giovanna's ex-husband was an alcoholic, and he liked decorating their home like a lounge. "He was a deliberate collector of vintage things from the '50s," she says. Giovanna stopped drinking in an effort to help him get sober, but it didn't help their marriage. "The healthier I got, the sicker he became and the thicker the divide between us."



↑ "Those mirrors were part of the décor of the bar area in our kitchen," says Giovanna. "Cleaning up his belongings was a job. I packed it all into the garage. Almost two years later, it's still sitting there. He's unable to face any of it."

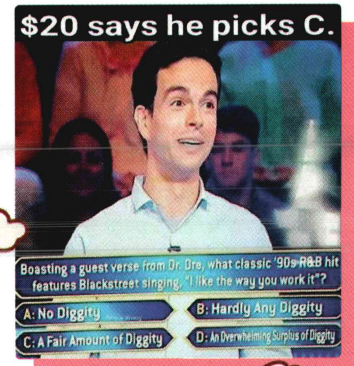
↙ Terri's living room, where she prices and sells items from her old life. "I had a 10-by-20 storage unit filled to the gills with things that I wanted," she says. "Now everything fits into a 10-by-9, and it's half-full."

↓ Terri and her ex-husband collected antiques and enjoyed attending auctions together. "I miscarried several times, and then at one of those auctions, my husband bought a rocking horse. He said, 'We will have a child together.' A year later, I ended up having my son. When I look at things like the rocking horse, I remember why I fell in love with him. But now, I'm purging that, too."

‘Oh my God!

The people behind the memes they can’t escape

By Chris Duffy Illustrations by Julian Gallese



In 2015, when I was a struggling comedian looking to make some extra cash, I went on the game show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Sadly, I did not win a million dollars (I made out with a cool $5,000). But I was asked about the classic R&B hit “No Diggity,” and the expression on my face in response to that question became a meme. (I got the question right, by the way.) Now I have an internet identity beyond my control: I’m the face of Clueless White Guy. Every four to six months, a new meme account posts my photo and another cycle of emails and messages from people I haven’t spoken with in years begins. A woman from my high school once sent me a screenshot of someone using my meme to catfish her on the dating app JSwipe.

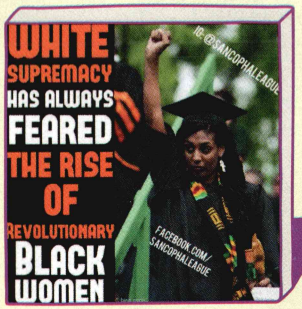
It’s an odd feeling, knowing that your photo is being shared by millions of strangers. Other memes, I figured, must understand my situation, so I sought out a few of them to compare notes.

MEME

Revolutionary Black Woman

WHO IS IT?

Hannah Giorgis



ORIGIN STORY

The photo, taken by the official photographer at Hannah’s Dartmouth graduation, came as a surprise: Hannah didn’t know it was being taken. When the photo company posted its pictures online for sale, Hannah’s made its way onto a number of African American Facebook groups.

IS THE MEME TRUE TO LIFE?

“It represents a particular feeling I had at a particular time.”

BIZARRE POST-MEME MOMENT

A friend of Hannah’s saw the photo being sold as a print by street vendors in Amsterdam, a city Hannah has never visited.

MEMEDOM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

“I’m not someone who believes that higher education is the only means of ‘racial uplift,’ but if my silly photo from 2013 can be inspiring in whatever small way to someone who’s having a hard time navigating those sorts of institutions, then I’ll always be glad this picture spread, however far.”

MEME

The Asian Baller

WHO IS IT?

Tim Kim

ORIGIN STORY

After an intense game of pickup basketball, one of Tim’s friends took the photo and posted it on Facebook with the caption, “I hope this becomes a meme.” Nothing happened for a year, until someone at WorldStarHipHop posted it.

IS THE MEME TRUE TO LIFE?

“I’m constantly just faking it till I make it. It’s pretty accurate.”

MEMEDOM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In job interviews, Tim has flashed his meme to would-be employers to break the ice. He says it’s actually helped score him a few jobs as an interaction designer for tech companies.

BIZARRE POST-MEME MOMENT

One day, walking around his neighborhood in Los Angeles, Tim saw “Wanted” posters with his face stapled onto every telephone pole as an ad campaign for the streetwear company Hall of Fame. “I called up, and I was like, ‘This is the Asian Baller. Are you looking for me?’ And they were like, ‘Wait, what? Who is this?’ … So I drove over and saw a giant cardboard cutout of myself. Everybody was like, ‘Oh my God! That’s him! That’s really him!’ ”

IS THE MEME TRUE TO LIFE?

"Not at all the same! I'm not some rich, spoiled woman!"

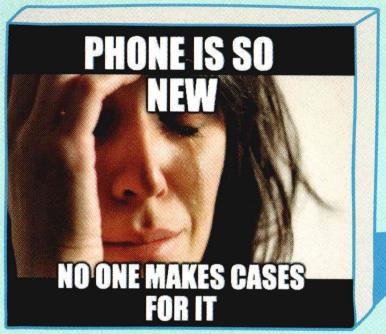
That's him!

MEME

First-World Problems

WHO IS IT?

Silvia Bottini



ORIGIN STORY

While still living in her native Italy, Silvia dated a stock-image photographer. He snapped a shot of Silvia crying in a temple on a vacation they took to China. The photo was staged. Crying on demand has long been one of Silvia's talents — she's a model and an actress. "I always look horrible when I cry," she says. "People laugh because my face can do expressions that are really funny in an ugly way."

BIZARRE POST-MEME MOMENT

Silvia appeared in a commercial in Spain, where the only thing that made her stop crying was Domino's pizza.

MEMEDOM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Though it hasn't necessarily brought her to tears, Silvia is unhappy about how she's been portrayed. "It's a curse." One upside? When she had to prove "extraordinary ability" to obtain a long-term U.S. visa, she placed the meme alongside her other work. She got the visa.

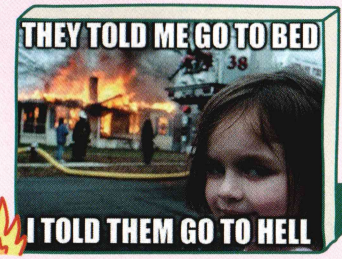
BIZARRE POST-MEME MOMENT

Zoe, now 19, recently learned (via a stranger's Instagram post) that there's a giant mural of her face in Porto, Portugal.

WHO IS IT?

Zoe Roth

MEME



Disaster Girl

ORIGIN STORY

In 2004, when the fire department in her North Carolina town did a controlled house burn as a training exercise, 4-year-old Zoe and her family walked down the street to watch. Her dad took this snapshot and entered it into a magazine's photography competition (it won). Two years after it was published, the photo went viral and became one of the internet's earliest (and still most recognizable) memes.

IS THE MEME TRUE TO LIFE? **"I'm not a sneaky person, but I still make that face to this day. It's who I am a little bit."**

MEMEDOM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

This past summer, when Zoe was working in Shanghai, BuzzFeed flew her to New York City and put her up in a hotel so she could stand onstage with the guys from "Damn Daniel" and other internet celebrities at an event called Internet Live.

That's really him!'

“A place without family.

Children who cross the border, in their own words

As told to Meher Ahmad and Haley Cohen Gilliland Photograph by Kitra Cahana

Since the beginning of 2017, immigration authorities have apprehended nearly 140,000 unaccompanied migrant children at the U.S.-Mexico border. Many more have been detained with their families. Some are separated from their parents for months at a time, others for just a few days, and some not at all. They are held in outdoor facilities and mammoth detention centers; they are sent to churches and shelters, group homes and foster families. The majority are eventually released to the custody of a parent, a relative who lives in the States, or a sponsor family — but without knowing whether they'll be able to remain in the country. Here are some of their stories.

CAROLINA*, 15, GUATEMALA. She and her mother were separated for seven months. When my mom and I got to the border, we had to cross a river and walk for a bit in the desert. Then immigration arrived, and we tried to run, but they caught us and loaded us into a car. While we drove, there was total silence. None of us spoke.

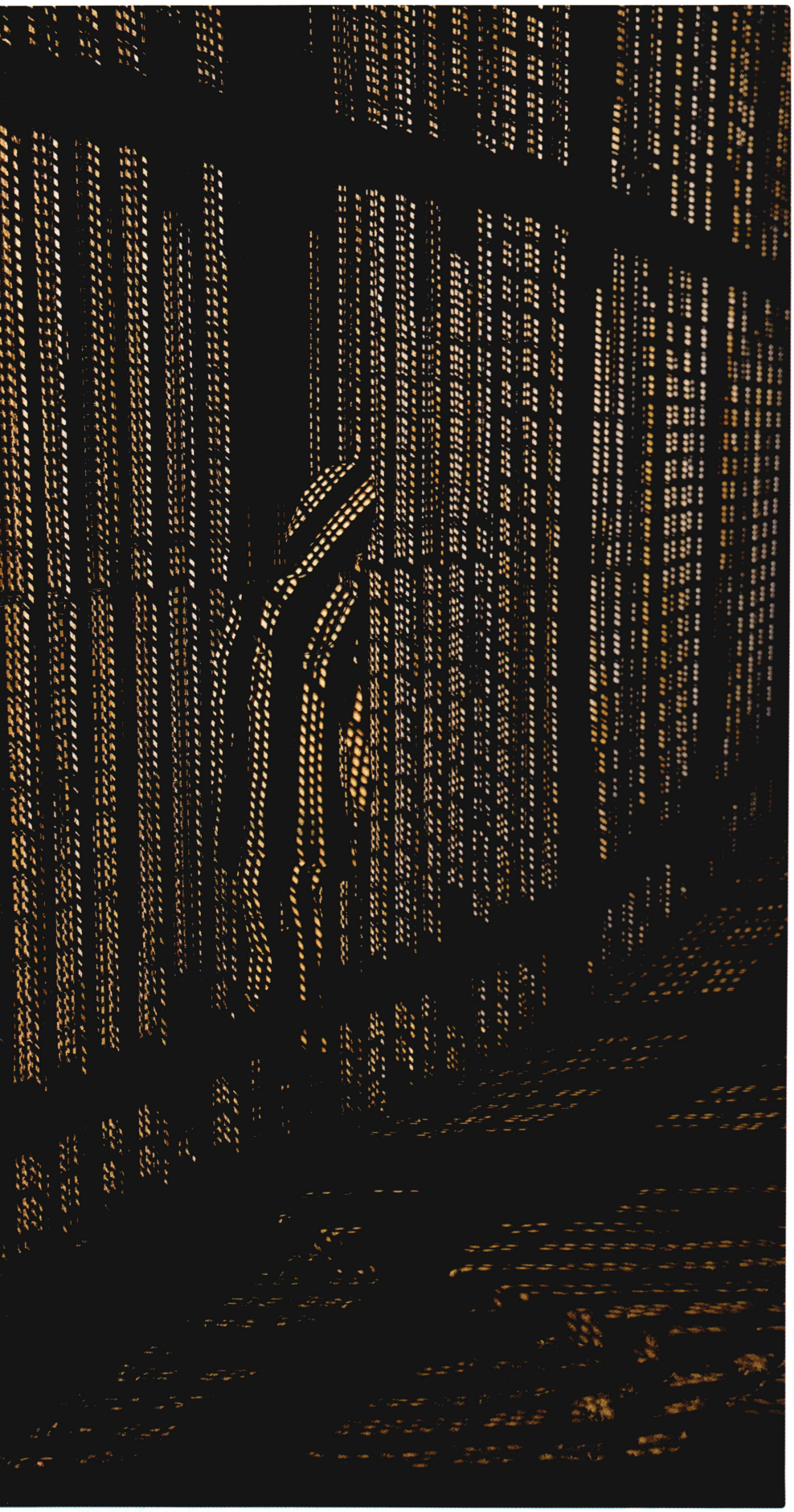
RICARDO, 9, GUATEMALA. He and his father were held in a detention facility for five days. I was tired. My feet were hot. I was afraid when immigration came. I thought they were going to kill me.

DOLMAR, 17, GUATEMALA. Immigration authorities detained him for 38 days. I made the trip with two men and a lady. When we walked across the border, immigration arrived. They didn't speak Spanish well. They checked us to make sure we were not drug traffickers, and then they brought us in. I was afraid, but I felt good because they were people from America.

CAROLINA They told me that they were going to send me to a group home in Texas. I was crying because it was really quiet and I was all alone. They hadn't told my mom and me they were going to separate us, so we couldn't say goodbye. One of the agents, a woman, told me not to be sad because they were going to bring me to a better place. But it would be a place without family.

JOSEFINA*, 9, HONDURAS. She and her little sister didn't see their mother for three months after Border Patrol picked them up. A woman told us that she was going to separate me and my sister from my mother and asked us to come with

**Name has been changed.*



her to a little jail for kids. She said we were only going to be there for one day, but we were tricked. Three days passed.

JULIO*, 17, GUATEMALA. He made the journey with his mother and two siblings, ages 5 and 3. After they caught us, they put us together with others. This was outdoors, and there was no roof, only umbrellas that covered women and children. It was very hot. The floor was made of dirt. I couldn't sleep there. When we arrived, no one told us what was going on or for how long we would stay in this place. My siblings were sitting inside the fence and played a little with other children. I was just taking care of them. We were there for about 31 hours locked up, and then they moved us to a house.

SISY, 16, HONDURAS. Crossing the desert, she and her mother got lost and separated from her stepfather and sister. Twenty days into detention, the family was reunited. We arrived at the "icebox" without knowing anything about my little sister and my stepfather. We were there for four days. My mom got a severe headache. I was very scared, so the immigration paramedics took care of her. Then we were put in another icebox at another immigration place. There were many fathers and mothers with their children, and we slept with aluminum blankets. We were like this for 11 days, and I couldn't stand it. My mom didn't eat.

DOLMAR I was locked up for four days without seeing any sunlight. Where I was, there were only children. We got to know each other until we became friends. Some children cried because they had been locked up for more than ten days and could not communicate with their families. I would tell them not to cry, that everything would be fine, that we wouldn't be locked in there all our lives.

CARLA*, 17, AND ALEJANDRO*, 14, HONDURAS. The siblings crossed into the U.S. unaccompanied. The agents took us to the migration station, where my brother and I were separated, girls from boys, for four days. On the way to

When I could distract

the bathroom, we were able to see each other, but we were too far to even talk. We were just motioning.

ALEJANDRO Even though I was tired, I couldn't sleep because I didn't know when we were going to be released.

DOLMAR They took me to a shelter in Miami. A lady took care of 11 children and told us we couldn't greet anyone with a hug because we would be scolded. They said they were going to let us make phone calls after a week, but it didn't happen. After ten days, I went to ask again. The other kids were able to make the call without waiting long. I was a little jealous. I finally got to call my sister in Guatemala after 15 days.

CAROLINA When I arrived at the group home, they brought me to a room with three other girls. When I crossed, I had a backpack, but they threw it out at the group home. I had a cellphone, headphones, and toothpaste, but they took that as well. I also had a crucifix, which I hid from them because otherwise maybe they would have told me to get rid of it, too. When I could distract myself, I would forget I didn't know where my mom was.

I found out that I could ask for art materials, and a teacher taught me how to draw different parts of the face — noses, eyes, mouths. The faces were pure inventions. They didn't belong to anyone I knew. I would also make bracelets by hand from thread. We couldn't give them to each other because we weren't allowed to have physical contact with other kids because they might say it's abuse.

We couldn't really say goodbye to people, either. Once, a girl told me she was leaving the next day, but we couldn't hug or anything, otherwise they might cancel her flight. There was one girl I got along with really well, and when she left the group home, she wrote me a note with a drawing. It said, "Thanks for your friendship. I love you a lot." A teacher ripped it out of my notebook.

Soon after, lawyers came and told me I couldn't stay at the group home anymore because more people were coming and there wouldn't be space. So one of the teachers brought me to Michigan, where I would stay with a foster mom. I was a little nervous when I first boarded the plane — I had never been on one — but I calmed down by the last hour. It was April, and snow was falling heavily. I thought it was incredible.

JOSEFINA They told us we were going to board a plane to New York. From the window, I saw lots and lots of little houses and cars.

HECTOR*, 14, GUATEMALA. He was kept in a different cell from his father for five hours. We took a plane to Oakland. It was a regular plane with normal people, not just migrants. It was my first time on a plane, so I didn't feel very well. I was afraid.

CAROLINA When we landed, my foster mom brought me in a car to her house. She showed me some things, but I didn't really understand her because she spoke to me in English, and I only knew basic words. I was comforted by the fact that there was a dog there. So I petted him, and it made me feel better.

JOSEFINA In school, I made friends with girls named Katherine, Esperanza, and Carlita. One was from Guatemala, one was from El Salvador, and the other was from Honduras. We played tag, and we also talked about how much we had suffered when they separated us from our parents and what was happening in our houses where we were being taken care of. On weekends we would go to church. We sang a lot of songs. There were people there who knew we had been separated from our relatives, and they brought us things to cheer us up. In New York, there seemed to be a lot of kids who had been separated from their parents, shopping for things with their host moms. Our host mom would point them out to us.

t myself, I would forget I didn't know where my mom was.

CAROLINA My first morning in Michigan, I woke up, and I thought that I was back with my family. But when I realized that I was in a different place, I got sad again. My foster mom treated me really well. She brought me to buy some new clothes and told me that I could get anything I wanted — that it would all be paid for. But I was too ashamed to buy anything. She kept lots of books in my room and bought me drawing materials. I would help her cook, and slowly I learned more English. She would make hamburgers and lasagna, but also enchiladas.

JOSEFINA I went with my sister to an airport. From there we took two planes to Texas, where my mom had been all along. There were a lot of kids there, and they called us out by name to be reunited. It frightened me because they called my name separately from my sister's, but I told them that we would only go together. The three of us stayed at a family center. Usually we were stuck inside our rooms between lunch and dinner. We would watch TV or paint little pictures of Tinker Bell. We were there for 26 days. On the day we left the center, we woke up at 4 a.m., and our lawyer was there to meet us. A friend of his took us in a car to where my dad was staying. I was so happy to see him again. He hadn't really changed much. He's a bit plump.

JULIO I still talk to my friends in Guatemala on Facebook — they ask me where I am. The last time I talked to them before I left, I told them I was going to run some errands, so they were worried when I didn't come back. They asked me why I didn't tell them I was leaving. I didn't tell them because I didn't know if I was going to make it.

CAROLINA After I had been in Michigan for two months, my mom was released from detention. To be honest, I didn't want to leave. I thought I was going to be there for more time, and I wanted to explore more and learn more English. I got to L.A. in the afternoon. When we landed, a social worker asked me what I thought — and I said it felt a lot like Guatemala because everyone spoke Spanish. I broke down when I saw my mom and my sister, who I hadn't seen in five years. We signed papers affirming that we had been reunited. I spent that day unpacking and showing them photos of where I had been in Michigan. We didn't really go out to explore because people had to work — that was one big difference. My foster mom had lots of time to spend with me.

DOLMAR Even today, I feel sad that I had left my family in Guatemala.

CAROLINA Sometimes people ask me if I want to go to Guatemala, and I say no. People are more taken care of here. I feel safe.

HECTOR I've been here a year — it's all right. I talk to my mom. She asks me if I'm OK. She tells me to study and not do bad things. I listen to her. Maybe she'll come someday.

SEARCH ON
A GOOGLE
ORIGINAL
DOCUMENTARY
SERIES

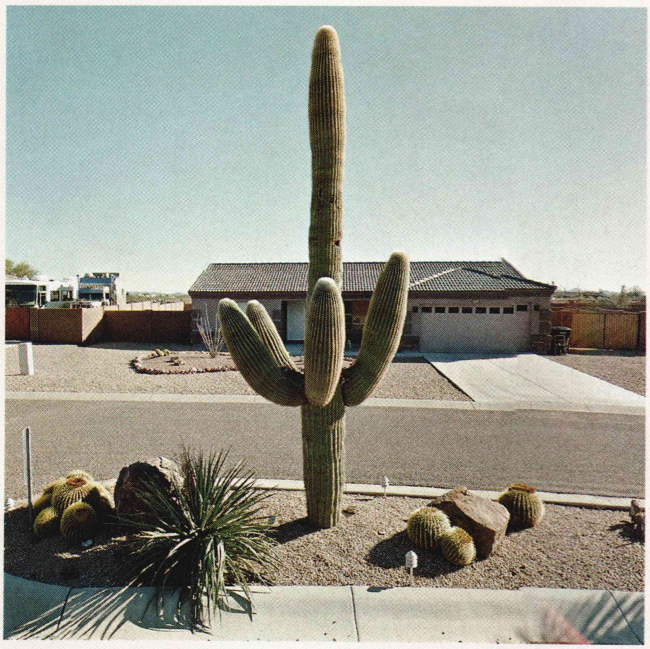
The Agoraphobic Traveller

» Jacqui Kenny has captured some of the most incredible places in the world. But what makes her photos different is that she took them without actually leaving her home.

For over two decades, Jacqui Kenny lived with severe anxiety, eventually getting diagnosed with agoraphobia, a complex disorder that includes extreme fear of public places and open areas from which escape could be difficult. Kenny found even just walking to the back aisles of the local supermarket to be a challenge.

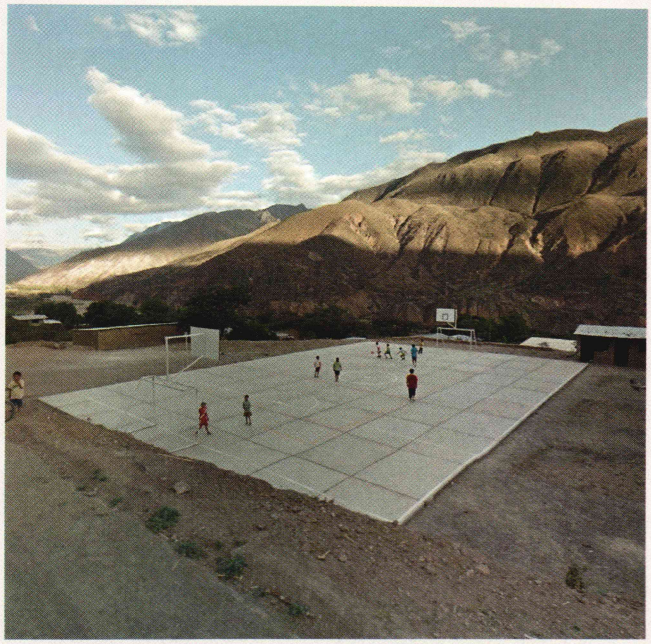
In search of a creative outlet, she found refuge through Google Street View. She found herself traversing remote towns and dusty landscapes, passing by architectural gems, and anonymous people, frozen in time. The more she traveled, what began as a hobby, quickly became a pursuit—a hunt for the hidden, magical realms of Street View.

BOUGAINVILLEA FLOWERS
MEXICO



CACTUS
USA

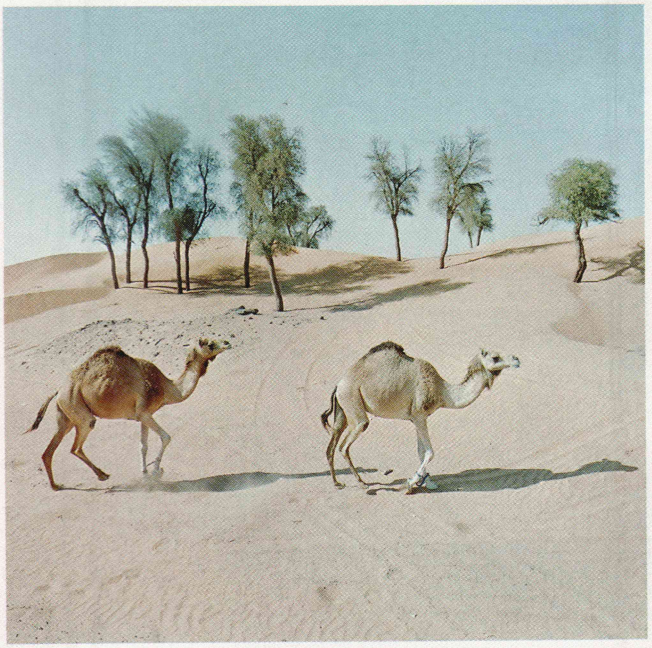
EMPTY PLAYGROUND
PERU



KIDS PLAYING FOOTBALL
PERU

DOGS AND YELLOW WALL
CHILE

HOLDING HANDS
MONGOLIA



SYNCHRONISED CAMELS
UAE

CAMOUFLAGED CAR
MEXICO

GOOGLE CAR DUST
ROMANIA

MOBILE HOME
KYRGYZSTAN

(TO SEE MORE OF KENNY'S WORK, GO TO G.CO/AGORAPHOBICTRAVELLER)

“ It felt like we had created a new identity,

THE WOMAN WHO RECLAIMED THE NAME HER MOTHER ALWAYS WANTED TO GIVE HER

My mom chose the name “Marchelle” when she was pregnant with me. She had a friend named Marchelle, who everyone describes as the Contra Costa County Mother Teresa: She would help the homeless and organize community events. She got cancer and thought she was dying, so five women in the area decided to name their daughters after her. I was one of them.

My dad was abusive and not a good person, and has been in and out of my life from the day I was born until I was about 7, when he completely split. My mom had a difficult delivery. When the nurse asked, “What do you want to name her?” my mom was kind of out of it. He told the nurse “Courtney,” which wasn’t what was agreed on. So I was stuck with a name my mother didn’t want for me.

I’ve been Marchelle my whole life. I’ve never known the name Courtney. When my mom signed me up for preschool, she had to put my legal name. I’m like, “Who’s that?” So she told me the whole story. The only time I was ever called Courtney was the first day of school, during roll call. They’d say “Courtney,” and then I’d raise my hand, “No, actually I’m Marchelle.”

When I was 10, my mom got tired of it. She went to the school district office and said, “You’ve got to change it. You can’t keep calling her by the wrong name.” To her, “Courtney” was a constant reminder of my dad and the letdown. So in middle school and high school, “Marchelle” was on all the paperwork.

I’ve wanted to change my name legally since I was 16. We were waiting until my 18th birthday because if I was still a minor, my dad would have to show up with us. We didn’t even know where he was.

The day I turned 18, my mom took me down to the courthouse, and we filled out stacks of paperwork. The whole day, I was waiting for my dad to burst through the doors and say, “No, I don’t approve.” My dad was an alcoholic and a drug addict, and he left a lot of damage in his wake. By changing my name, I finally got to shed all of that.

I haven’t met the original Marchelle — she survived — but I have met three of the Marchelles named after her. It’s always been in random places, usually when I worked retail. Someone would say, “Oh, that’s my name.” And I’m like, “Were you named after…?” and we’d have that aha moment. We keep joking that we’re going to track everyone down and have lunch one day.

Marchelle Rose Johnson

MARCHELLE JOHNSON, ANTIOCH, CALIFORNIA

THE MAN WHO ADOPTED A NEW NAME FOR THE BULLFIGHTING RING

I was about 10 years old when I first saw a bullfight. We went to Nogales, on the Mexican side of the border. My mother wanted to see this particular bullfighter, an American woman. I was enthralled. As I got older, I would go to the library and read anything I could about bullfighting.

When I graduated high school in ’59, I told my folks I was going to fight bulls. I bought a motorcycle and rode it to Mexico from Tucson. I wrote out a plan of what I had to do. I had to learn the culture and the language. I realized there’s no *juh* sound in Spanish. “James” was not going to cut it for my career. You can translate “James” to “Diego,” “Santiago,” “Jaime,” “Jacobo,” or “Iago.” I liked “Diego.”

In my early 20s, I had my *alternativa* in Tijuana. It’s a ceremony where you go from being a professional novice to a full *matador de toros*. You take out your cape with your name on the back; mine said “Diego O’Bolger.” My mother was there with an aunt. They saw everybody calling me Diego, especially when I did laps around the ring.

In Mexico, the people are living next door to Godzilla; there’s a complex that everything is bigger, better in the United States. I didn’t want to force “James” onto them. And for me, changing my name was like, *Now, this is what I want to be.* I was shy and introverted, but in bullfighting, you’re performing. You project yourself to people. So I took acting classes and a dance class, too. What changing my name did was make my bullfighting career official.

Diego O’Bolger

DIEGO O’BOLGER, TUCSON, ARIZONA

THE COUPLE WHO CREATED A NEW LAST NAME FROM SCRATCH

ALISHA We met in high school. In college, it just so happened that Math ended up living in the apartment next door, and we started dating. It took ten years of being together before we decided to get married, and one of the factors we struggled with was how we felt about the institution. But it started to feel dangerous to not be married. We watched family members go into the hospital and started thinking, *What would happen?* Math wouldn't be able to make any decisions on my behalf.

MATH In the end, we thought, *Well, if it's just our own personal hang-ups about marriage, we can define it the way we want.*

ALISHA I knew a couple that got married and created a last name together, and we thought it was a cool idea. We went back and forth for a year about different ideas — it was so painstaking.

MATH It got to the point where we were throwing out any word we liked, and then just making up words. I was at work one day, and she texted me a list of names she had come up with, and one of them was A-E-R-A-O. I remember liking it and saying maybe we drop a letter so it doesn't look like "aero," like "aerospace." We could pronounce it the same. It struck a chord. Because we were also into archery at the time, it felt fun. And unique: When you Googled it, it didn't already mean something. It felt like we had created a new identity, like we'd become superheroes.

ALISHA Most of my life, my relationship to my old last name was mostly negative. I grew up in a little racist town in Florida. Though I was raised mostly by my mother, who is Italian, I looked more Venezuelan, which is my father's side. A lot of my teenage years were spent doing things to hide my race. Disliking my last name was part of that, along with wearing blue contacts and other weird stuff that amazes me when I look back on it. Now that I'm on the other side of it, there's a little part of me that mourns my old last name.

MATH In some ways, changing our name was more impactful than the marriage itself. It felt like we were bound together and not just by paperwork.

ALISHA ERAO, PORTLAND, OREGON

MATH ERAO, PORTLAND, OREGON

THE TWO-TIME DIVORCÉE WHO CHANGED HER FIRST AND LAST NAMES

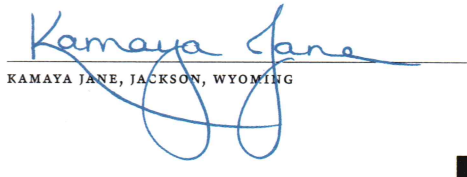
The first time I went to Israel, in 1990, I learned the word "*kame'a*," which means "talisman" in Hebrew. I thought it was the most beautiful word I had ever heard. I said to my friend who taught me that word, "Someday, that is going to be my name." Then it went out of my head.

I got married. I got divorced. I got married again. I got divorced again. My given name is Jane, and my last name after my second marriage was Murphy, which I never really felt comfortable with because that is not a good name for a nice Jewish girl. While we were married, I still practiced Judaism, and we kept conveniently kosher in the house. Nothing really changed in the way I lived my life except for the fact that I was a Murphy and we'd visit my husband's family for Christmas.

When I got divorced in 2011, I woke up one morning and thought, *If I'm going to change my name, I don't have to change just my last name. I can change my name, period.* I decided I want to be Kamaya.

I changed my name legally in 2012, about a year after my mom passed away. "Jane" became my last name, and "Kamaya" became my first name. I kept Jane because my maternal grandmother died when my mom was 9 years old, and I was named after her because that's what Ashkenazi Jews do. You name people after people who have passed away to keep their spirit alive.

In Kabbalah, they say that if your life isn't going well, you can change your name and it changes everything. I think it really did do that. Believe it or not, I'm going to give marriage a shot for a third time. When I met my fiancé, one of my very best friends had already started calling me Kamaya, and she was the person who introduced me to him. So my fiancé has always known me as Kamaya. After we get married, I will be Kamaya Jane Cohen.



KAMAYA JANE, JACKSON, WYOMING

like we'd become superheroes."

Five people who abandoned their names

As told to Ann-Derrick Gaillot

We're trying to be the

There are guns on the table. Three rifles, two handguns. A shipment that came in early this week from a man in Memphis. Bruce Seiler calls out to his volunteer: "You cleared them, right, Ross?" Ross doesn't hear too well. Asks Seiler to repeat the question. "Except for that .22," Ross says. "I don't know how to open that."

Seiler carries the gun out of the workshop. Against the Montana backdrop — verdant mountains, reams of blue sky — he examines the weapon. "This is a really dumb-looking Beretta, and it's greasy as hell," he says. Seiler is 66 and lanky, with a woolly mustache and eyebrows to match. He checks the chamber to make sure there's no bullet in it. Then he brings it back in and picks up another gun — a revolver.

"These types of guns are known in the antique-gun circles as 'suicide specials,'" he says. The modern versions of these are called "Saturday night specials" — there are a few specific features that distinguish them, but what really defines the guns is that they're cheap, poorly made pieces of crap. "Do you see how this spins around?" he gives the cylinder a twirl with his finger, then jiggles it back and forth, showing that it's loose in the frame. This kind of gun, he says, isn't even safe for target practice. "What we'd do with this is render it so it's not functional."

We're at the headquarters of the National Center for Unwanted Firearms, a big name for a small organization with a monumental mission: ridding America of its unwanted and unsafe guns. Seiler is the organization's co-founder. He and his partner, Chip Ayers, are both former U.S. Secret Servicemen. They run the organization with the help of a few volunteers and an assistant Seiler pays out of his pocket. When someone wants to dispose of a gun, he or she can visit the NCUF's website or call its hotline, and Seiler and Ayers will make the arrangements.

On a nearby table, neatly displayed in little plastic baggies, are a bunch of Saturday night specials in pieces. Seiler shows me how he does it: He turns on a big, noisy band saw and cuts them up. Then he photographs them and logs them in a book — evidence for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives that the weapons have been disabled.

↑ A destroyed Saturday night special from the 1960s

junkyard.

By Marin Cogan

Photographs by Andres Gonzalez

It's impossible to know exactly how many guns there are in the United States, because no one is keeping a thorough count. But it's safe to say the country is glutted with them. According to 2018's Small Arms Survey, there are more than 393 million firearms in America, though some estimate that more are out there, uncounted. Still, that's more guns than people. Our rate of firearms ownership is twice as high as the next highest country's. The stockpile grows every year. The ATF estimates that 3.6 million pistols were manufactured in the U.S. in 2018. 2.8 million rifles. One million of what they call "miscellaneous firearms." A half-million shotguns. A half-million revolvers.

There are other facts about our country's relationship with firearms, ones that are easier to quantify. We have the highest rate of gun-related killings of all of the high-income countries on Earth. In 2017, the most recent year for which data is available, guns killed nearly 40,000 Americans — more than at any time in the past 50 years. Most of those deaths were suicides.

What happens when the owner of one of these 393 million guns decides he doesn't want it anymore? Most people know how to recycle their papers, their plastics, their glasses, their metals. If someone needs to dispose of old paint cans, outdated electronics, or a car, she can usually find a drop-off facility by searching for one online.

But there's no easy, centralized way to dispose of a gun. Buyback programs aren't always available. The local police department might take them to destroy or give to officers for training or personal use. But some police departments will resell them. It's entirely up to the owner to find out. Federal firearms-licensed dealers will buy guns — as long as the owner is fine with having the gun back on the market to be sold to someone else. And if a person were to try to offload a gun to a friend, or in a private sale, that transfer could carry legal repercussions. Or: A person could reach out to the NCUF, or one of the handful of organizations like it, and have them take the gun instead.

Seiler is emphatically not anti-gun — he owns several and made a career in them. He grew up the son of an Army Ordnance colonel and was leafing through weapons manuals before he was old enough to fully understand them. He began competitive sharpshooting in his early 20s, with guns he built himself, and set two world records and won six national competitions. His marksmanship caught the attention of the Secret Service, which brought him in as a consultant and an ordnance specialist in the 1980s.

"I'm like the Rain Man of guns," he says. Show him any gun — seriously, any gun — and he can recite the make, model, gauge, and something interesting or unique about its provenance. After his time in the Secret Service, he worked in weapons sales to law enforcement for the gun manufacturer SigArms. He even owned a gun shop at one point.

But Seiler watched, with dismay, as gun violence exploded over the past 30 years. "I guess I'm a sensitive person, and I just felt horrible every time I'd read about a kid that got hurt in a home accident," he says. When he started his career, guns were far less plentiful and more difficult to make. He always assumed they'd eventually reach market saturation and people wouldn't want to buy any more. Instead, the opposite happened. "We need to get rid of some of these guns," he says. "There's no junkyard for guns, so we're trying to be the junkyard."

Chip Ayers, who is 62, didn't handle a firearm until his early 20s, when he was beginning his career in law enforcement. He was a counter-sniper and later taught other officers. He was working for U.S. Customs and Border Protection in the late 2000s when he was tasked with putting together a response plan for workplace shootings. "You get engulfed in it — the shootings, violence," he says. In the next couple of years, after the school shooting in Sandy Hook, after the Navy Yard shooting in Washington, D.C., he wanted to do something to help solve the problem. The political debate appeared to be going nowhere. But offering to help people who voluntarily wanted to get rid of their guns? That seemed small enough, and practical enough, to work.

When people contact the NCUF, the organization asks what they'd like to have done with their guns — if they'd like to sell them, donate them, or have them destroyed — and it'll take it from there. Donations are usually sent to law enforcement or a museum, depending on the gun. The vast majority of owners want to sell their weapons — they've made a

financial investment and aren't willing to give their guns up for nothing. So Seiler and Ayers will help connect them with a dealer who has a federal firearm dealer's license, ensuring that their gun will end up in the hands of someone who's passed a background check.

They've fielded inquiries from all over the country. There was a couple in the midst of a divorce, arguing over what would happen with their guns. A man who'd acquired an AK-47 who wanted it out of his possession. A hospital in California, which called to say

Most people know how to recyc

that people kept leaving guns in their drop box for old prescription drugs. Ervin Rivers retired as a Marine Corps colonel in 2004 after 30 years of service. Even though he'd been trained to work with weapons, he never kept any for personal use — until his brother gave him a 9 mm pistol. When he died, his brother left him the rest of his gun collection. For seven years, Rivers tried to keep up with their maintenance, but he felt like he couldn't anymore. "My wife and I searched online for a way to safely dispose of weapons, and we were astonished at how difficult it was," Rivers says.

John Luczyszyn also was a Marine, and when he came home to attend college, he realized that the hunting rifle he'd bought was now mostly collecting dust in his parents' closet. "Nobody talks about getting rid of them," he says. He looked for a buyback program in Philadelphia, where he lived, but couldn't find one. Luczyszyn met with Seiler and donated the gun to the organization, telling him they could decide how best to deal with it. He says it was "more about getting it off the street completely and making sure it's not getting sold."

Bruce Seiler removes the barrel of an AR-15 that will be donated to law enforcement. ↙

The NCUF began collecting guns in July 2015, when Seiler received an email through his website from a man who lived in a small town south of Erie, Pennsylvania. "We've recently had a really bad spate of killings," the man wrote, referring to some homicides that had been making headlines in the area. He was getting older, he said, and his kids didn't want his guns. "Shooters aging out, of course, are only a small part of the problem of unwanted guns, but it's a start. I'm tired of the pro-/anti-gunner dialog ending with 'No new gun laws. Enforce the laws you've already got.'" The man sent Seiler a list of the guns he wanted to let go of — a dozen total. Seiler flew his little four-seat Cessna across the country to meet him. He took one of the man's handguns and cut it into pieces.

That man was my dad. I grew up in a part of the country where, it seemed, everybody owned guns and learning how to shoot them was more practical than political. Target practice was a family affair. And that didn't change, even when a student at my school brought a gun to the eighth-grade dinner dance in 1998. I was too young to attend the dance, which was held at a nearby recreation complex, but I was standing with my best friends a few feet away, on the first hole of a mini-golf course next to the dance hall. At first, I dismissed the noises I heard as balloons popping. But then a bunch of students came running outside, crying, in formalwear and corsages. The news traveled fast, if incorrectly: A student had shot a teacher named Mr. Gillette in the leg. There wasn't much time to think through what happened next. Someone shouted that the student was now outside. Everyone scattered. A bunch of us crammed into the concession stand between the dance hall and the mini-golf course. One of my best friends, on instinct, ordered us all to get on the ground. While we were huddling there, knee to knee, the owner of the complex talked the student into giving up his weapon.

There's a lot that we couldn't have known right in the moment. That three others had been hit, and that Mr. Gillette had been shot in the head

cle their papers, their plastics, their glasses, their metals. But there's no easy way to dispose of a gun.

DOCFEST
SF DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL

2019 OFFICIAL SELECTION
Indie Grits

BEST MINI-DOC COMPETITION
BIG SKY
DOCUMENTARY
FILM FESTIVAL
2019

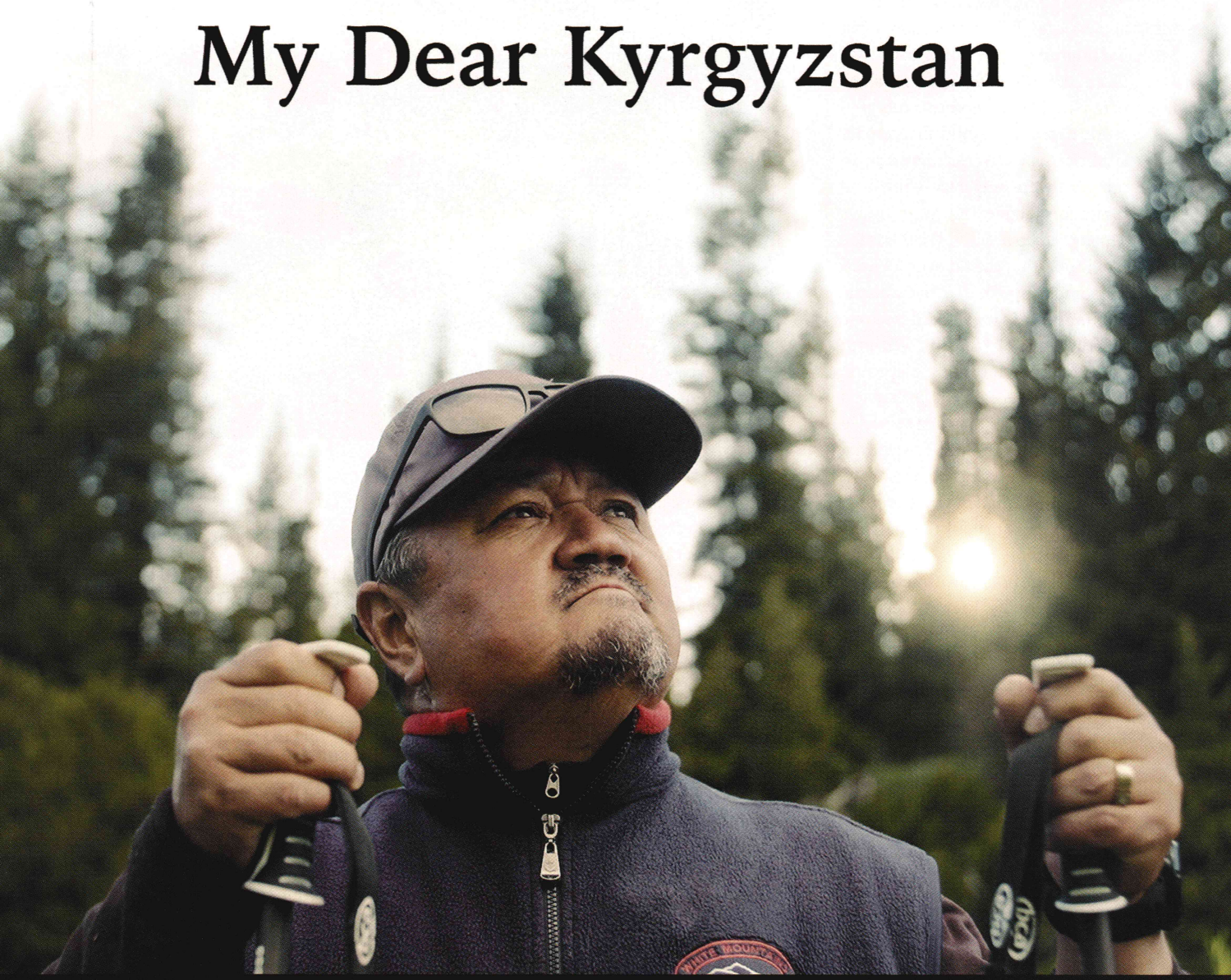
2019 OFFICIAL SELECTION
ATLANTA
FILM FESTIVAL

OFFICIAL SELECTION
American
Documentary
Film Festival
2019

OFFICIAL
SELECTION
MOUNTAINFILM
2019

OFFICIAL SELECTION
Melbourne
Documentary
Film Festival
2019

My Dear Kyrgyzstan



Meet Emil. He's a social media-obsessed entrepreneur in the mountains of eastern Kyrgyzstan. He loves his village and wants to make it into a tourist destination. Watch his story—only on Mailchimp Presents.

mailchimp
presents

"I guess I'm a sensitive person, and

and killed. Or that my classmates and I were at the beginning of the school-shooting generation. The shooting in Jonesboro, Arkansas, had happened exactly one month before. A year later came Columbine, and after that Red Lake, Minnesota, and then Virginia Tech. The debate raged, furious and strangely static. At some point, I began to think more about the family gun collection. *What did it mean to own those guns?* Even more difficult: *What would it mean to responsibly rid ourselves of them?*

My dad was weighing that responsibility, too. We weren't hunters, so our guns were only ever being used for target practice. They were always kept locked up in a safe. What was the likelihood that they'd ever be used for something good? What was the likelihood that they could become instruments of tragedy? Without better options for safely disposing of our guns, it's easy to think that it might be better if they just stayed in our possession forever. That's what initially drew my dad to the NCUF.

↗ Destroying a sawed-off shotgun, which was confiscated from a crime scene

It's possible that my family's position is unique. Guns are incredibly polarizing. But it's easy to think that because the NRA is the loudest voice representing the interests of gun owners, it's representative of the majority of them. Seiler and Ayers are both gun owners. They support the right for people to own them safely and legally. They're also both lapsed members of the NRA. Seiler gave his membership up in the 1980s, when the organization started sending him alarmist mailers about gun-control groups trying to take his Second Amendment rights away. "I hated it," he says.

Above all, they want the NCUF to be a nonpartisan organization. "The way I look at it," Ayers says, "is that if we don't stay neutral, we'll no longer exist." Still, they are trying to take small steps into the public arena, finding instances where they think people can reasonably agree. Most Americans want to see an end to the era of mass shootings. Most want to see a reduction in violent crimes, suicides, and gun accidents in the home. So, last year, when the March for Our Lives rally led by the survivors of the Parkland school shooting came to Washington, Ayers did something that, as a lifelong cop, he thought he'd never do. With his daughters, he made signs saying PROTECT OUR FUTURE and THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR UNWANTED FIREARMS and went to a protest. "At some point in your life, you have to take a stance in your beliefs," Ayers says, showing me the photos on his iPhone at a coffee shop in downtown D.C. "I didn't go into this lightly."

d I just felt horrible every time I'd read about a kid that got hurt in a home accident."

Four days after I met with him, a gunman walked into a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, and murdered 22 people with an assault rifle. Later that day, another gunman, in Dayton, Ohio, killed nine more people outside a bar. When I called Seiler to check in, he told me their phones had been ringing off the hook. They had been hearing from gun owners, he said, who were having second thoughts. "They found that their guns aren't popular," Seiler said. "They feel like they're not helping anything." ❡

OUTER MONO LOGUE

Outer Monologue is a new animated series about what's going on in someone's head when they're playing it cool on the outside. And it's only on Mailchimp Presents.

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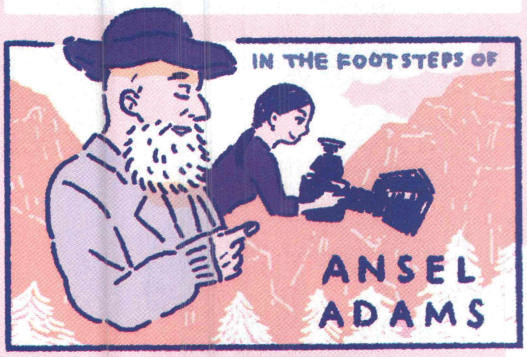
10 GOLDEN STATE ESCAPES

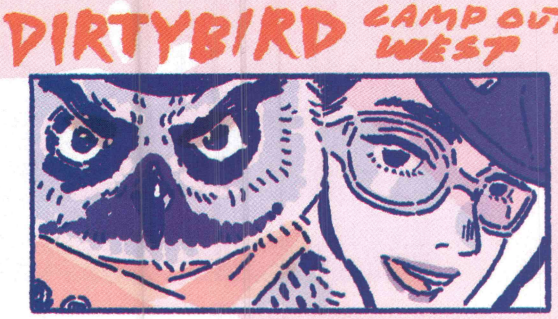
Presented by eventbrite



Yosemite National Park
SEPT. 14 - DEC. 31
» Focus your viewfinders on the same landscapes as iconic photographer Ansel Adams, whose work was both artform and environmental activism.

Los Angeles, CA
SEPT. 14
» Join streaming platform kweliTV for a traveling brunch event celebrating award-winning short films, docs, and digital series from the African diaspora.

Palm Springs
SEPT. 29 - OCT. 5
» Discover new artistic talent while toasting some historic blues legends in this week-long art-and-music festival dedicated to lesbian culture and female empowerment.



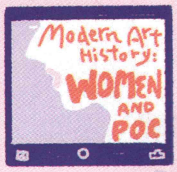
Waterford, CA
OCT. 4 - 6
» Hosted by music label Dirtybird Records, this imaginative weekend music fest transports grownups back to those childhood days of summer camp, with the appeal of the adult, all-night rave.

Oakland, CA
SEPT. 27
» Revel in Southeast Asian culture through cuisine, comedy, and storytelling with exclusive dinner prepared by James Beard semifinalist Chef Nite Yun.

Oakland, CA
SEPT. 22
» The night includes the premiere of Rania Lee Khalil's "The Third World Ecology Trilogy' with a Palestinian-Syrian-inspired dinner by Chef Reem Assil, and a performance by electronic group 47soul.

San Francisco, CA
OCT. 18 - 20
» Join healers, psychics, and all levels of the occult-curious for a magical weekend of modern witchcraft. The gathering includes astrology workshops, a sabbath film festival, and an "energetic clearing" by a designated spirit guide.

Sonoma, CA
SEPT. 12
» Legendary Chicano labor leader and civil rights activist Dolores Clara Fernández Huerta will share her enthralling stories to inspire future social justice supporters.



San Francisco, CA
SEPT. 5 - 28
» Here's an avant-garde idea: an entire Modernism art history course on the overlooked work of nonwhite and female artists.

SAN FRANCISCO, CA
OCT. 25 - 27
» Venture into the great unknown! Through workshops and installations, this creative exhibition explores the "many facets of space" to reveal how technology like VR can enhance, expand, and redefine how humans connect to the world.

The California Sunday Magazine Brand Studio partnered with Eventbrite to curate an entire collection of independent events this fall. View the full list at Eventbrite.com/c/californiasunday

Artwork by Lisa Kogawa

PHOTOGRAPH BY PENG KE

I had been working in the American West for well over a decade when, on Labor Day weekend in 1987, I stumbled across an artists event in Nevada's Black Rock Desert. A group of people in color-coordinated outfits were playing croquet with 6-foot balls, 15-foot wickets, and mallets in the form of pickup trucks with tires mounted on the front. The event was called Croquet X Machina and planned with great attention to detail with one oversight: The organizers hadn't anticipated the desert's fierce winds, which turned the game into chaos. Two years later, the artists came back with an event called Ya Gotta Regatta. Everyone brought kinetic sculptures that responded to the wind — oversize chess pieces with sails, suspended balloon works. Of course, there was not a breath of wind the entire weekend. The event was a bust.

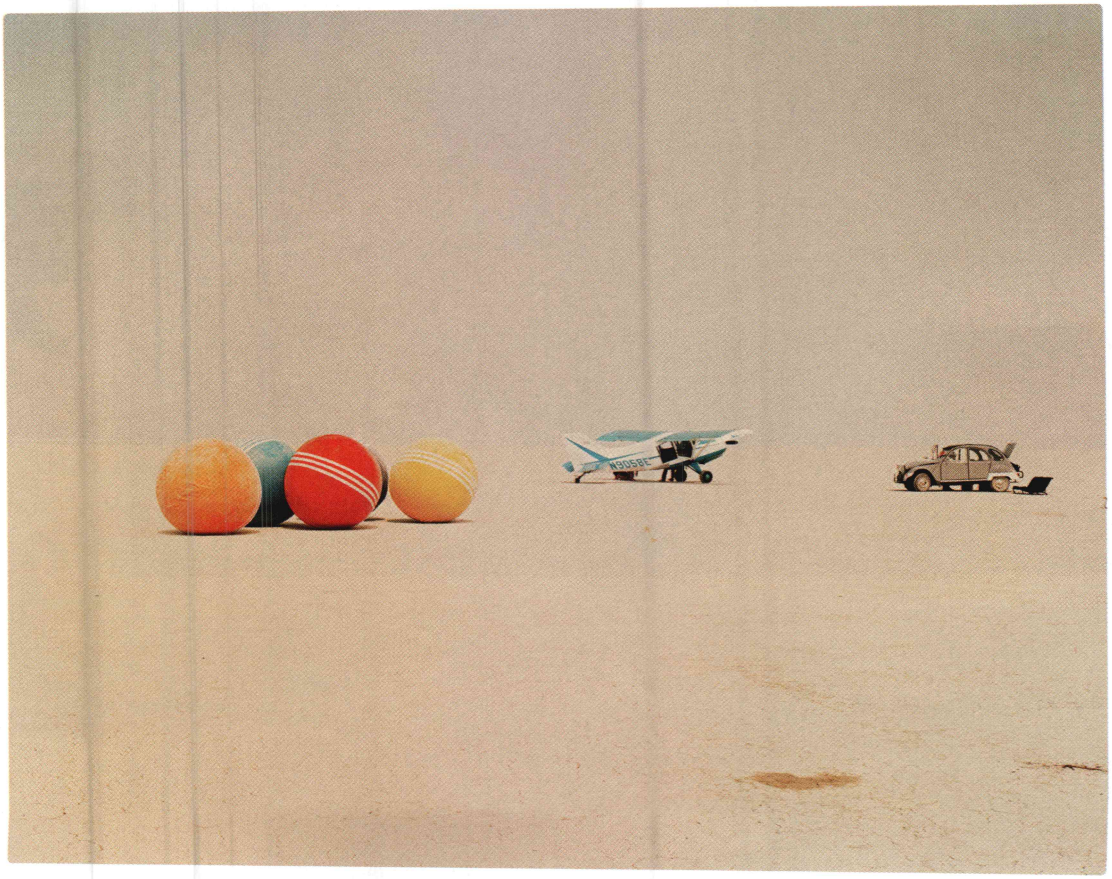
When I went out to Black Rock Desert on Labor Day the next year, I didn't run across anything. But the year after that, 1991, another group of artists showed up with a huge wooden sculpture of a man they planned to set on fire. The original Burning Man had been held at Baker Beach in San Francisco for several years, but this was the first sanctioned event to take place on the desert playa. Maybe 250 people were there. The crowd hoisted the man up by ropes. People made their own modest sculptures. They didn't bring elaborate installations the way they do now. There were no designated areas, no fees. You could just camp anywhere. I returned the next year to photograph and kept going until 1998. Everything was loose. One time, an airplane flipped upside down trying to land. When Burning Man reached about 15,000 people, I stopped attending. By then, it had turned into an extravaganza. I was much more interested in its modest origins, when it was an unexpected gathering of artists who were creating a community on a vast, empty, vegetation-less expanse. →

“There were no designated areas, no fees. You could just camp anywhere.

Coming across the first official

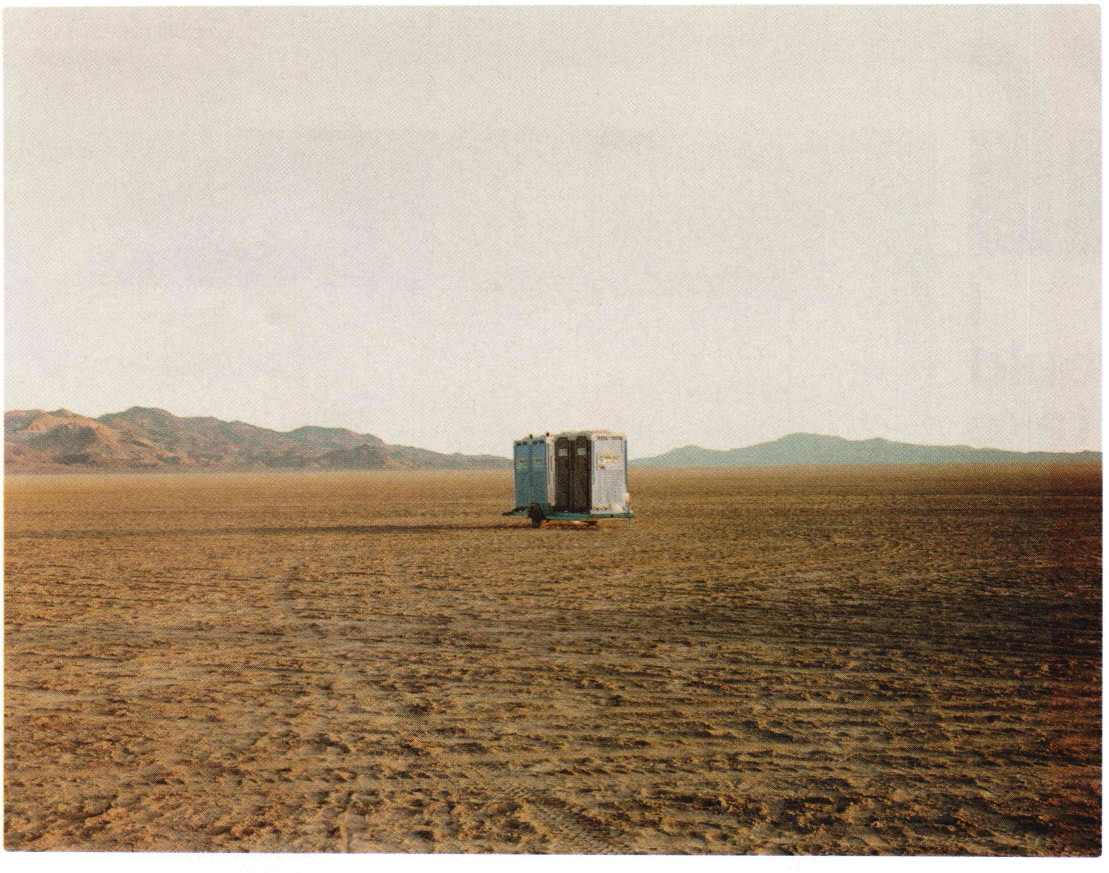
Burning Man *Photographs and text by Richard Misrach*

↑ Burning Man, 1991



↟ Burning Man, 1992

↑ Croquet X Machina, 1987



↟ Burning Man, 1992

↑ Ya Gotta Regatta, 1989

“I would take out $40, $50 at a time and

The cost of leaving an abusive relationship

By Ashley Powers Illustrations by Cecilia Carlstedt

put it in this duffel bag.

An abuser doesn't just beat his victim, he disables her car so she misses work. He surveils her spending. He refuses to get a job but gambles away her paycheck. Many domestic violence cases have an element of what researchers call economic abuse, or attacks on a victim's self-sufficiency. At every income level, this can make it harder to escape, to establish independence. When she fled, Mary and her husband had been together about three years. They had a 2-year-old son. (She also had two children from previous relationships.) She had no job, no money, no car, and seemingly no way out. By contrast, Samantha was the breadwinner in her 15-year marriage, with a lucrative job at a tech company. But that didn't make it easier to leave with their 1-year-old daughter. Had her husband gotten a whiff of her plans, she said, "He would kill me."

MARY*, OREGON I was working as a medical assistant. I had been sober for many years, and I got together with this guy who was in law enforcement. It started with the accusations: I was cheating with either the patients or the doctors. He would text me 50 times a day, telling me I'm a piece of s---. And then he said we couldn't afford for me to have a car, and he would get me to and from my job. He coerced me into having unprotected sex — I feel today he got me pregnant on purpose. I had the baby and stopped working.

SAMANTHA, SILICON VALLEY **My partner drove a delivery truck. He quit his job. My company went public, so he had no reason to go back to work because we could afford whatever we wanted. I cashed out a bunch of shares, put a down payment on a house. I thought I was controlling the books, but I really wasn't. We bought this sports car when I was pregnant. It didn't really make sense. It's a two-seater — I couldn't put a car seat in it. But the physical abuse was always a present threat. He could just curl his fists into little balls, and I knew that I'd better tell him what he wanted to hear.**

MARY He came home one day and said, "Hey, I found a house in the country. It's beautiful. You can have a garden." The house was very isolated. It was a 2½-mile walk to get to the store. I didn't have a driver's license. I didn't have a phone. I didn't have a bank account. We were completely dependent on him. He even controlled what I ate.

SAMANTHA **My work was having an event at the end of the day. They were like, "We really want you to be there." I came home before it started, and he's clearly upset. I make him soup; he throws it at me. He pushes my shoulders down to the floor, and he's like, "You better clean it up." So I lick the soup off the floor, vomiting twice. And he proceeds to kick me in the ribs. I ask him, "Why are you doing this?" And he says, "Because your work is clearly more important than me." From that point forward, I never participated in anything outside of work hours, ever.**

MARY Sometimes our neighbors would hear us screaming. It would echo out into the country. The cops would come, and it always ended the same: I would lie to them. "No, those are not handprints on my neck." I had started using drugs when it got really bad, and I was afraid they were going to arrest me and take my baby. The only thing I had left was that baby. →

** Names have been changed.*

SAMANTHA I realized I am not in a relationship. I am in a prison. But I didn't know how to get out of it. He had trackers on my car. He had trackers on my phone. I couldn't even take my daughter on a walk by herself.

"They said I needed to bring my ex into the bank to close our existing ac

MARY He was head-butting me in the face, telling me he was going to smash my pretty teeth out. I could see my little boy running around in circles next to me, crying hysterically. I had a moment of clarity. A day or two later, I was home with the kids, and he was harassing me via text. I remember standing in the kitchen, looking at a sink full of dirty dishes with tears in my eyes, thinking, *I just can't live this way.*

This girl lived across the field from me. We had become friends. I went to her house, and we called child welfare. I just unloaded: "I'm using drugs. My kids are not safe. My husband beats me. I've got a tube in my lung right now from what he did to me." I did not want my kids to be removed, not at all. But I didn't have any money, and I'd been so cut off and isolated. I thought about suicide a lot before I realized I could call child welfare.

SAMANTHA I contacted a domestic violence group. They said I should put away some money. If I took it from the bank account, he'd know. He was very paranoid, so he kept our passports and a couple thousand dollars in my daughter's diaper pail. I would take out $40, $50 at a time and put it in this duffel bag at work under my desk. He never came to my work, so I wasn't worried about him seeing the bag.

I had a doctor's appointment for my daughter, and I knew that he wouldn't go. The appointment was at 8 in the morning. I had coordinated with my friends that I was going to drive to the hospital, leave my car, my cellphone, my laptop, everything. They were going to bring my duffel bag, and they were going to put me and my daughter in another car and drive me to a place that my husband had no idea about. I didn't know if I was going to lose my job. I didn't know if he was going to empty the bank accounts. I didn't know if he was going to go crazy and shoot up the people at my work.

MARY We stayed at a shelter in town. I lay down that first night, and I remember looking at the ceiling, thinking, *I was the wife of a cop, and now I'm living in a shelter.* That was the last time I used drugs. I just stopped. Then I moved to a sober-living house. There was a no-contact order between my husband and me. I broke it — I called him, and we had a fight over the phone, and he hung up on me. He told child welfare, and the very next day, they took my baby. He was in foster care for about nine months.

SAMANTHA I only took $800 with me. I didn't want him to notice. My first divorce attorney asked for a $20,000 retainer. I put it on my dad's credit card because I didn't want my ex to know what attorney I was working with.

I could not access my bank account on the advice of my attorney. A few weeks in, I heard from some friends that my ex had gone on a trip. I went back, got a police escort, got the keys to one of our vehicles that was paid for, and sold it for $20,000. California is a no-fault divorce state. He's entitled to 50 percent of everything. So I put $10,000 back in our bank account and took the other $10,000 to start a new account. It was a proactive way to make sure that later on he didn't say I was trying to steal from him.

I tried to open the new bank account at our credit union. They said I needed to bring my ex into the bank to close our existing account. I was like, "My life is in danger." They were like, "That's not our problem." My dad contacted a branch manager. It turns out she was a domestic violence survivor, and the next day she shut down the old account and opened the new one.

MARY The sober-living house cost around $350 a month. I didn't know how I was going to take care of myself. I never learned how to pay my bills. I started looking at jobs and was willing to take anything. A friend who had a body shop hired me. I just sanded cars and got my head together. People coming out of domestic violence are scattered and confused; it took me a while to even make it to work on time. After a while, I was able to buy a $1,000 car.

I had gone for so long without having things that I hoarded clothes. If they were too small, I kept them anyway. Maybe because I had lost all of my clothes. I only took a suitcase. There was a day when I went to the store to get tights. Suddenly, I had nine pairs of tights in my cart. I called my Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor, and I was in tears. I was like, "I don't really need all of these, but I really want to buy them." You never, ever have an extra $20 when you're using drugs, and so I had a bit of a spending problem. I had to learn how to have money again.

SAMANTHA Notifying work was scary. My leadership team was understanding, but I think it took a lot of internal meetings. They issued me a new laptop. I left my old one behind because he was tracking me. They let me work from home. My daughter and I were moving from house to house — of friends and relatives of friends. I was afraid of being found. I called my aunt. She and my uncle cleared out their office and bought a mattress, and we slept on their floor for a few months. I got my finances back in order. This unit opened up next to my aunt, and I moved in. I had a pretty substantial security system put in. Every noise I heard, I thought, *Is he breaking in?* Every time I'd look out the window: *Is that his car? Is he watching me right now?*

ccount. I was like,

'My life is in danger.' They were like, 'That's not our problem.'"

MARY My dad beat my mom when she was seven or eight months pregnant. I thought that's just the way that families treat each other. I really did not know that it was not OK to beat your wife. Because of child welfare's involvement, I had to do domestic violence classes. I had to do parenting classes. I had to do drug and alcohol treatment. Child welfare paid for everything. When I realized what had been happening in my life, I was so angry.

The day the divorce was finalized, child welfare closed my case. I got into a housing program so that I could move into my own apartment. An advocate from a nonprofit came by every week to see how I was, how the kids were, did I need shampoo. My ex and I only really communicated about things like our son's medication.

I went to community college and took classes in social services and business administration. Now I work for the nonprofit that helped me. I pay all of my bills myself. I had an outstanding hospital bill that was almost $4,000 from when my husband collapsed my lung. I paid it. It's gone! My credit score was around 400, and now it's close to 700. I have a house that's paid for. I don't have a mortgage. It's a three-bedroom with beautiful wooden floors. I have a blueberry bush in my backyard.

SAMANTHA **I needed the divorce to be over so we could move on. I gave up a lot of money and assets just to be done, and I walked away with debt. In California, a biological parent has the right to maintain a relationship with their child. The court allows my ex to see his daughter every week for two hours under supervision. I pay $500 a week for security to come with me because he's attempted to attack me while I'm getting her out of the car or putting her in. In the last couple years, I spent between $60,000 and $80,000 in security costs. That's not the divorce cost. That's not the cost of my attorneys.**

I have to operate every single day at threat level orange. I don't go on my phone when I'm walking in a parking lot. When I'm loading my daughter in the car, I look around and see if there's anyone sitting in a car around me. My new life is good, but it's constantly shadowed by, *Is today going to be the day when he flips out and attacks me?*

Having this half-hour of absolute quiet —

Photographs by
Tanyth Berkeley
Cristina de Middel
Lester Guijarro
Peng Ke
Xiaopeng Yuan
Larissa Zaidan

Interviews by
Chico Felitti
Beimeng Fu
Marielle Wakim

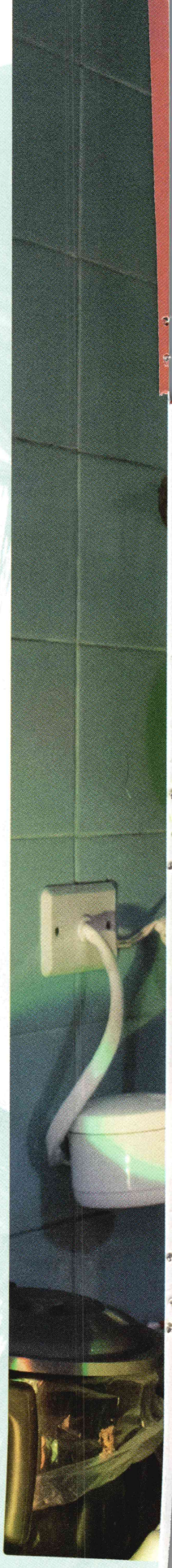
Illustrations by
Elaine Lin
Eleonora Marton
Mike Nudelman
Clay Rodery
Yoshi Sodeoka
Liam Stevens
Nicolas Uribe
Joey Yu

People in three continents share their idea of escape.

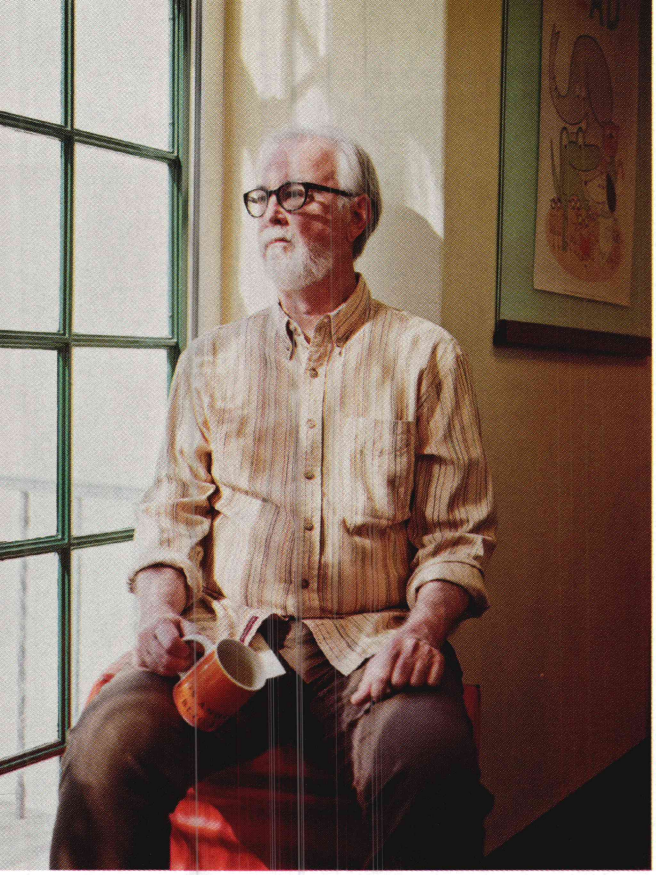
I like that a lot.

It's the telenovela a housecleaner watches during her long commute, an arcade where a teenage girl dances after school, an airport employee's standby flight to a country he's never seen. Residents of three of the most populous cities in the world — São Paulo, Shanghai, and Los Angeles — share where, and how, they get away.

→ *When I close the bathroom door, it feels like there is just myself. I mash avocado with olive oil and leave it on my head for 30 minutes. I comb my hair lock by lock, then take a shower. It's like meditating, a ritual of patience.*
IZABELLA MOREIRA DE SOUZA SILVA, 19, ACTRESS, SÃO PAULO



PHOTOGRAPH BY LARISSA ZAIDAN



↓ *The library is eight floors, and I'm in the basement. We don't see sunlight down there. But half an hour before the library opens, I sneak up to the literature collection, near the top floor, with my coffee. You're looking down at the entire library, and you can see the sculptures and the chandeliers. The light filters in through these tall windows. Having this half-hour of absolute quiet — I like that a lot.*

GLEN CREASON, 72, MAP LIBRARIAN, LOS ANGELES

→ *My mom and I share a room, and our beds are pushed together. My dad died last August. When I miss him the most, I wait for my mom to go to sleep and cry. Every day, I come to this arcade and practice on the dance machine. When I started dancing at age 8, I realized how all the things that make me unhappy can go away. Sometimes people gather and watch; the more people there are, the happier I am.*

XU YAHUI, 16, HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMAN, SHANGHAI

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TOM'S WORLD

THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPH BY CRISTINA DE MIDDEL. OPPOSITE: PHOTOGRAPH BY PENG KE, ILLUSTRATION BY JOEY YU

↙ *When things are slow, I go on the internet and study English. When I started working at night, I began a course on Duolingo. It's nice. You see yourself improving. Speaking is difficult, but reading is easier. I have a daughter who lives in Atlanta. She went to study there, then ended up getting married. She's not coming back. I've never gone to visit her, but I have an idea of going to live there.*

VALDIR REINALDO DE ARAÚJO, 53, DOORMAN, SÃO PAULO

↓ *The rent for our house is 1,000 kuai ($140) per month, and it's less than 20 square meters for the four of us. I deliver more than 1,000 orders every month — I have to race for every minute. Last year, I had a change of heart about Shanghai. Other cities like Suzhou and Wuxi are more affordable, and life won't be as burdensome. I also have the skills to make noodles, so I hope to open a little shop.*

ZHU ZHIHAI, 45, DELIVERY MAN, SHANGHAI

← *Ninety-five percent of my life I spend at work. There was one evening when I attended a cocktail party with a client. The event was in a tall building. The sun was setting, and the light had this almost holy quality to it. Standing up there, I forgot that, once the evening ended, I would have to go home and keep working.*

ZHOU YUE, 30, BANKER, SHANGHAI

↑ *I work for American Airlines, so I can fly as much as I want on standby — anytime, anywhere. I've been to six continents, all the Disneyland theme parks, and all Seven Wonders of the World. My favorite place is Victoria Falls in Africa. I travel by myself. I try the food, see the main attractions, then I come right back or go somewhere else.*

MIKE "CHEETO" CHEATHAM, 32, BAGGAGE HANDLER, LOS ANGELES

THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPH BY TANYTH BERKELEY. OPPOSITE: PHOTOGRAPH BY PENG KE, ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE NUDELMAN

↑ *I do homework in the morning, at noon, and in the afternoon. My mom and dad supervise. I practice writing words from memory. Sometimes the words are too hard. I want to live by myself in a villa next to the beach. All day, I will watch good cartoons.*

ZHANG JINHAN, 8, SECOND GRADER, SHANGHAI

↑ *I wish I could go back to Charlottesville, Virginia, when I was 8 or 9 years old. I would be sitting on my great-grandmother's porch, and I would be snapping green beans with her, because that was the one cooking job she trusted me with. We would always snap the beans very particularly — first one end, then the other end. We'd sit on the porch swing, and she would push the swing gently because my legs weren't long enough. If I could, I would listen to all of her stories more carefully than I did the first time around.*

NINA SHAW, 65, TALENT ATTORNEY, LOS ANGELES

THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPH BY LESTER GUIJARRO, ILLUSTRATION BY ELEONORA MARTON. OPPOSITE: PHOTOGRAPH BY PENG KE, ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELAINE LIN

↑ *I go to a traditional Korean spa. You can even spend the night there — it's open 24 hours, and it's happened to me and my husband a couple of times. You get a massage, you go upstairs for dinner, and after you've eaten, you lie on this mat on these warm marble floors. Once, my husband and I just fell asleep. When we woke up, it was 7 in the morning. I was like, "Oh my God, you want to get coffee?"*

REBECCA NINBURG, 50, FIRE COMMISSIONER, LOS ANGELES

→ *If I could, I'd go back to an era in which political correctness didn't exist. I've lived through the before-the-military regime, the military regime, and the post-military regime. There is a big difference in these three. But in the last 20 years, there's been an antagonism against personal opinion. It's not institutionalized, but when you write a message, you have to think ten times. I correct and exclude my opinion.*

FRANCIS BERNARDES, 71, LAWYER, SÃO PAULO

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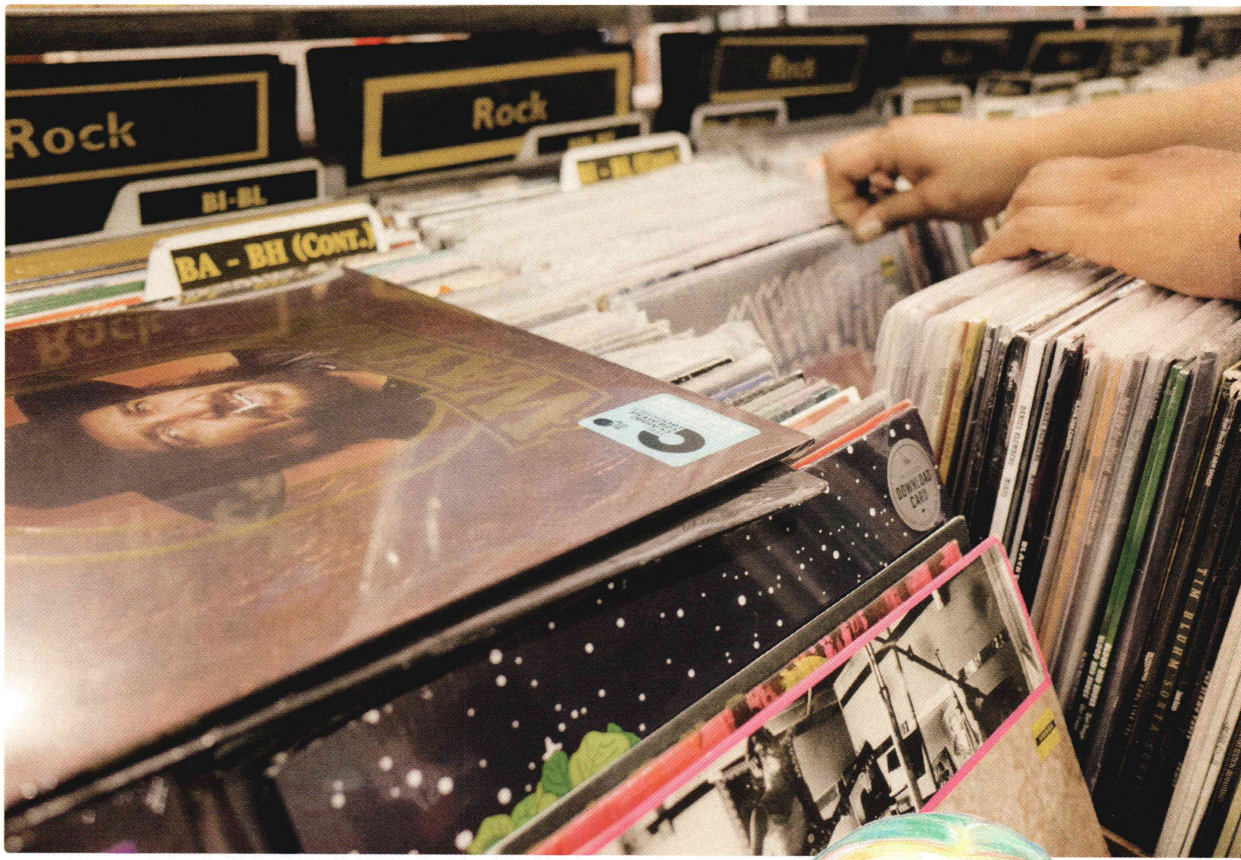

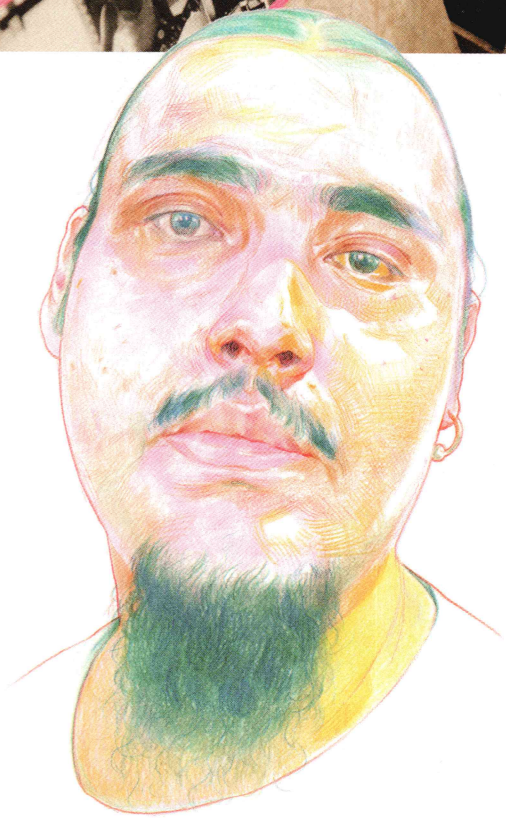

← *Since I've retired, every weekday, I leave home at around 8 and bike to a stock exchange. I make tea, turn on the computer, then I wait for the market to open. I have more than a dozen stocks. I follow the beat of the activities, and at 11:30, I'll have lunch. The market reopens at 1 through 3, then I ride home with the day finished. Playing the market helps me kill time and endure the stillness of old age.*

KONG QINGPING, 65, RETIREE, SHANGHAI

↑ *When I was 6, my dad showed me a CD of the band Kiss. He first heard it in Guatemala, so he sang the lyrics in broken English. I started picking up Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath. The place I go to escape from being in the kitchen for 12 hours a day is Amoeba Music. I rummage through the vinyl — it's like window-shopping. You put it all in your basket, and then you just chicken out like,* I can't keep them all.

RIGO ALVARADO, 29, KITCHEN MANAGER, LOS ANGELES

THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPH BY LESTER GUIJARRO; ILLUSTRATIONS BY NICOLAS URIBE. OPPOSITE: PHOTOGRAPH BY XIAOPENG YUAN; ILLUSTRATION BY YOSHI SODEOKA

← *Ever since I had my boys, I don't think I'm ever alone. I take the bus for three hours to work and three hours back. During the ride, I either sleep or watch soap operas. I get super involved in the show* Órfãos da Terra *[Orphans of the Earth] with the sheiks from Arabia. It's the only time I do something for myself. Once I get home, I have my son André take a shower. I give Pablo a bath. Then I make food. I don't even take off my shoes — not until I go take a shower at 12 a.m.*

ANDREA RAMOS, 39, HOUSECLEANER, SÃO PAULO

↓ *I'm from Okinawa, and I've been working in Shanghai for about ten months. My boss compares me to my colleagues all the time. He's Japanese. When Japanese superiors raise their voice in the office, everyone looks over, but no one dares say a thing. When my boss does this, I feel that everyone must be thinking,* She can't do anything. *The bathroom is the only place that I can escape to. I look in the mirror and say to myself,* I'm fine. I can do this. *I want to cry, but I will myself not to. Even if it feels impossible, I smile. Then I go back to work.*

FUJITA RUMI, 49, TRAVEL AGENCY WORKER, SHANGHAI

↑ *If I have 15 minutes and need to let my brain go, I'll go to Ross Dress for Less. I'll have a Birkin bag, but I'll be at Ross. You're still being kind of productive. You don't even know what you need, but you find stuff that you can't live without: Play-Doh for the kids, hair ties or tweezers, a curvy cucumber cutter.*

SHEILA NAZARIAN, 40, PLASTIC SURGEON, LOS ANGELES

→ *Here in São Paulo, I can't see the moon. I don't know how many stars are in the sky. We live on a floating rock in the middle of nowhere, but we pretend we don't. I have a plan to flee to Iceland. It's a volcanic island, and there are sensations there that I would never feel in Brazil, like the sea breeze on the black rocks.*

ANDREA YAMAGISHI, 33, BANK TELLER, SÃO PAULO

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You seem suspiciously clever for a blonde.

Why I left my jobs in gaming

By
Leslee Sullivant

Illustrations by
Angie Wang

Let me preface everything by providing a few critical facts: In August of 2018, *Kotaku*, an online publication that focuses on the games industry, published a story about the culture of harassment at Riot Games. Colleagues braver than I put their names out there for the world to see, and the article bore their personal experiences. In the aftermath of the piece, more former Rioters publicly discussed sexism at the company, some sued, and current Rioters walked out in protest of the company's forced-arbitration policy. The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing is also suing the company for refusing to hand over salary data about alleged pay disparities between men and women.

All of which explains why, when I tell people I worked at Riot Games, they go, "Oh, wow." When I tell them I worked there for six years, they tend to use words like "yikes" and "Jesus."

Video games have always been a part of my life. Many hours were spent playing games with my parents — saving the world from a sentient meteor in Maniac Mansion, trying to escape a magical realm as Mickey Mouse in World of Illusion, and mercilessly shooting demons in Doom. In college, I had a part-time job in accounting and never had any intention of going into games. I thought working in that industry was reserved for people with computer science degrees (I was studying psychology). Then, a family friend, who at the time worked in quality assurance at Riot, told me that my major didn't matter at all. So I took a chance.

Riot makes the very popular online game League of Legends. For a long time, it was touted as the "biggest game you've never heard of," mostly because it was huge in China. But chances are if you know someone between the ages of 13 and 25, they're aware of it. In League of Legends, you're grouped with four other players, and every player chooses a character, called a Champion. Champions have their own unique sets of abilities, backstories, and visuals — you could be a ninja assassin, a stalwart warrior, or a seductive spider-lady. Then you're pitted against five other players, competing to destroy the other team's base before they get yours. There's a lot more nuance, of course, and it's pretty fun if you're into competitive games.

I see you worked at GameStop. That must've sucked, huh? The remark caught me off guard. Shortly after asking my family friend about Riot, I found myself interviewing for a customer service position while I was still in college. That question was my first taste of Riot culture, and I ate it up. It was so unexpected, so casual, so unlike a traditional office setting. The ten-minute interview concluded with, *Well, I just needed to make sure you weren't weird.*

And that was it. I signed my contract in November 2010, as employee number 110- or 120-something — a contract that was meant to expire by the end of the year, and one I blatantly disregarded: They never stopped paying me, and I kept showing up.

Women in games are a novelty, and that was even more the case in 2011. Game companies are varied, from indie studios with small, scrappy projects to "AAA" developers (pronounced "triple A," but I insist on "AAAH!") that spend millions making blockbuster titles like Halo and Call of Duty. These companies are mostly made up of men, which is probably not entirely surprising given that video games have been largely marketed toward boys, and anyone in the gaming workforce in 2011 certainly grew up with that idea. There are hundreds of major game studios; only a handful are led by women. The number led by people of color is even more abysmal.

I spent those early years at Riot answering online tickets that players had sent in about their problems. They were mostly account related: lost passwords, refunding in-game purchases, or trouble signing up, usually because they were younger than 13, the minimum age to play. My discomfort at Riot started early. During my first month on the job, a guy (I want to say "boy" — we were all so young) repeatedly asked me out despite my having a boyfriend, then lashed out when I rejected him. I also found myself deflecting attention from another pushy colleague, who would find excuses to hover over my desk and suggest that I break up with my boyfriend because he didn't play League of Legends. When his attempts kept persisting even though I had said no several times, I took it to HR, and he became very cold.

Then there was the time, during a three-day company retreat (a cruise), that a colleague of mine — we'll call him John because I can't, for the life of me, remember his name — invited me to his room even though he was married. After I declined, he took a long sniff of my hair and told me I smelled nice. The next morning, I mentioned what had happened to a friend. She was disturbed, but we didn't talk about it after that. The following Monday, a manager in Player Support asked if he could speak to me. *I heard John was being super gross to you*, he started. Before I knew it, the company's legal team was asking me to go over the details of that night and asked if I'd had anything to drink. I knew

they were trying to cover their bases, but it didn't make it any less humiliating to have to answer, *Yes, one mai tai.* John was swiftly exited from the company; I heard this was not his first offense. A few days later, I received some messages that John sent through League of Legends' in-game chat system, including one saying I had ruined his life.

It was as if I had caught Riot in the tail end of its preteen stage and puberty was starting to hit. The company eventually formed an internal communications department called the Ministry of Culture and Propaganda, and we were given a list of values, called the Riot Manifesto, that described a good Rioter: Take play seriously, player experience comes first, focus on talent and team, challenge convention, and stay hungry and humble (also referred to as "humbition").

These tenets didn't really stick, at least with my team. A Rioter I didn't know said, *You're really working that ball over there*, when yoga-balls-as-chairs became the office craze. Another complained to our People team (what we called HR) that he could see my bra through my shirt (I learned about it days later and still don't know which shirt caused the great offense). A third Rioter told me, *You seem suspiciously clever for a blonde.* Once I graduated from school, the managers of Player Support asked me to be our interim recruiter because I was "organized," which at the time sounded like a compliment, but which now I realize is one of those words never used to describe a man.

My favorite video games have always been role-playing games, like Final Fantasy — the ones where you follow a group of characters around a strange world and wield swords and use magic against monsters. These games usually come with a hefty amount of exposition and character development. I prefer an 80-hour, story-driven journey over a fast, competitive online game. After I had established some success in Player Support, I asked to switch to Creative Design.

The department was essentially the writers' room for characters in League. We would come up with the themes for new characters (are we making an ax-wielding strongman or an ice queen?), invent names (Vel'Koz, Azir), craft the voice-over lines they'd say during a match ("You hit like a baby ram! No horns yet!"), and create biographies that outlined their personalities, backstories, and motivations. I joined as a writers' assistant, which was a mix of running daily standups, keeping track of due dates and calendars, taking notes, and contributing my own creative work whenever I had the chance.

When I tell people I worked at

At some point, we posted a position for a second writers' assistant. The department was growing, and we were exploring more projects. We brought a man into the office for a panel of interviews. The handful of us who had met with him gathered into a small conference room for a roundup, where we all discussed how our interviews went. Thumbs-up from the entire room, which wasn't surprising. This guy was great. The head of Creative Development blurted out, *We should make him a writer instead because no guy wants "assistant" in his title.* There was a brief silence. My eyes darted from man to man in that room. My brain lost all impulse control. It's the one moment at Riot I think about every day.

I have "assistant" in my title, I said. I had no strategy in that moment; I wasn't gunning for a title change or promotion because I had been told it takes years to climb out of my role. *Why is it OK for me to have that title?* One man out

of the entire group stood up for me. *Yeah, Leslee has that title*, he offered. We were both met with silence. The room agreed to talk about it later. The job candidate was hired as an associate writer.

Some time later, an executive assistant — a woman — was hired to take on the majority of my scheduling duties so I could focus on writing instead. I saw my chance to shed myself of the assistant title, and during a one-on-one with the new creative director, I asked to become a writer. I didn't ask for a raise; I didn't even think to do so. Nearly four years into Riot, I was simply grateful to be there.

I was able to hold onto my shiny new title for a grand total of about four months before the word "restructuring" was tossed around. Not in a downsizing type of way, but in a "get rid of the dissenters" type of way. I saw the writing on the wall — I had created a fuss about being an assistant. I made up some excuse about wanting to slide into a heavier support role to my manager, who knowingly nodded and fast-tracked my transfer.

In 2015, Riot moved into a new, sprawling campus. There was a part-time falconer to ward off the seagulls. Lunches and dinners were provided to meet all our needs as we worked late into the night. The company also started hosting "Ask Me Anything" sessions, where questions and comments, anonymous or otherwise, were fielded in an internal online forum. In response to one question about the lack of women in tech fields, an anonymous Rioter rebuked the idea of trying to get more women to apply for engineering jobs within the company, writing, "Video games are the last bastion of masculinity."

Months later, at an in-person AMA, which was held in a small auditorium, I asked a question that would end my career at Riot, one that had nothing to do with what was truly troubling me about the company. The host was the head of International Publishing, the department I was now working in. After my stint as a writers' assistant, then a writer, I spent a few months working as a development manager (making sure projects were getting done on time and within budget), before moving to North American Publishing, which handled marketing, collegiate activities surrounding League of Legends, and in-person events. At the AMA, I asked a series of questions about personnel changes, ones that seemed to annoy the host, who wasn't expecting me to keep raising my hand. But it was after he said that the company's goal was to engage as many players as possible that I posed a question he had no patience for: I asked why, if engagement mattered, he had slashed our events budget. He looked at me in front of a room of 50 and said, *You're just here to make trouble.* Then he ended the AMA and left the room.

My manager later sat me down in a conference room. *I've been getting feedback about the AMA*, she told me, and I immediately felt my face turn hot. I was given the choice of putting on a smile for the rest of my time there or leaving. I chose to leave.

I decided to try my luck at a smaller company. My logic: Maybe I could avoid some of the toxicity. I interviewed at a game studio in Seattle for a producer position on an unannounced game. My husband and I had moved to the city about a week before, and I got the job. This studio was a complete 180 from Riot's office and culture. There was no free, on-campus coffee or smoothie bar and only one conference room. Everyone had a defined role. There wasn't a ton of politics. But still, I was a woman in games.

The flavor of sexism at this studio was more of the "your Boomer uncle" variety than the gross, insidious kind I encountered at Riot. I was once asked by a co-worker if I didn't want children because of the "physical transformation" I would go through. An executive complimented my glittery slip-on sneakers one day, and after telling him I wore them to my wedding, he retorted, *Your husband let you do that?* I laughed and said my husband loved me for it. That was the worst it got for me. I could take it in the moment, but it was still exhausting. I hadn't escaped, and I didn't think I could as long as I made the choice — over and over — to place myself in this world.

So I decided to leave in every imaginable way. My husband got the idea of getting in an RV, traveling from California to Montana to New Mexico, and distancing ourselves from our lives, at least for a short while. And we made it happen. In that 33-by-8-foot space, I sat at a small desk and did the best work of my career. I wrote a novel about a woman living in a similar trailer, post-apocalypse. I created pixel-art projects and a tiny game prototype that featured a flawed woman as its protagonist, spawned directly from my experiences in games. I started making things that finally spoke to me even though I never planned for them to make me wealthy or famous.

None of it was glamorous or easy — dumping a black tank certainly never is — but I figured out what was important to me when all of the bulls--- was stripped away. I got to see what existed outside a life spent trying to fight an entire industry. Once that grip loosened — of Riot, of all those places — I was free to build new worlds, better worlds.

t Riot for six years, they tend to use words like "yikes."


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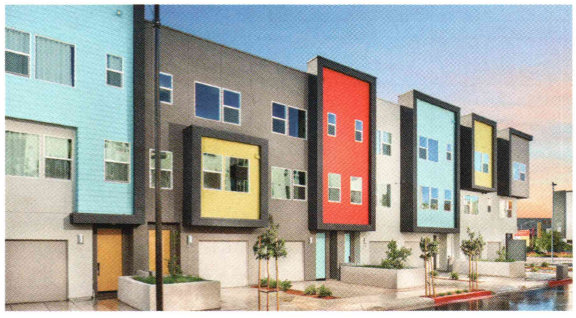

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RESIDENCES

How six people (briefly) get away from their families

At home, I'm holding my breath.

THE FATHER WHO TREATS A TRIP TO WHOLE FOODS LIKE A VACATION

Essay by Todd Levin

The scent of local nectarines, splayed obscenely for every passerby, sends me into a reverie, until I'm jolted out of it by the rude buzz of a text from home: "still with yr mistress?" I don't know how long I've been snaking my cart through Whole Foods' commodious aisles, but certainly long enough for my absence to be a burden on my family. Eventually and inevitably, when I stumble through our front door reeking of glycerin soaps and hauling the organic milk and tortillas we needed, plus the three additional bags of groceries that had beckoned to me from the supermarket shelves, Lisa will remind me how long she's had our children by herself. My defense will be, as it always is, "I was running an errand, for *us*." This is a lie in two parts — Whole Foods isn't drudgery; it's my private pied-à-terre. And the groceries might be for the family, but the time I spend at Whole Foods is entirely for me.

This is not meant to be a toast to absentee parenting. Besides, that's more of a skill set from my parents' generation, who so fully abdicated any child-care responsibilities that there are millions of grown Gen X kids who could reasonably claim cable television was their legal guardian. No, if anything, my wife and I are a symptom of the pendulum swinging back — parents who are embarrassingly attentive to our children's needs. Free days spent crawling around on all fours, searching for the microscopic bullets misfired from one of my 4-year-old son's constantly evolving Lego "shooters," or sincerely honoring my 6-year-old daughter's demand to know which direction I prefer the sequins on her flip shirt — "bunny's eyes open or bunny sleeping?" Lisa and I moderate every dispute, kiss every bruise. We begin every weekend asking, "What should we do with the kids?" And end every evening, brains and bodies depleted, improvising bedtime stories about Batman just so our children can fall asleep knowing all the bad guys are locked away in Arkham Asylum. So it's no wonder that it isn't enough to find time for yourself; time must be *stolen*. That's why I've learned to exploit every minute of solitude artfully, where even a blink of a moment can produce the same flood of serotonin as an unexpected snow day.

Initially, I kept it simple — by locking myself in the toilet. It's surprisingly easy to stretch a routine urination into a bathroom staycation. If you've read one of my tweets or liked any Instagram photo posted since my first child was born, you've probably interacted with something I produced while sitting on a toilet. I found a seated position was optimal for multitasking and kept track of time by noting when my feet were falling asleep. Eventually, of course, I grew greedy, responding to lengthy work emails, burning through op-eds, and extending my bathroom breaks well beyond reasonable, into "we're concerned about your health." So I mixed it up — stealing an extra minute parked in front of the house, while I caught the end of a true-crime podcast,

feeling a sudden urge to bake something complicated. But none of these compares to the time-sucking relief of grocery shopping.

Trips to the supermarket, once compulsory, have become a kind of bliss. And unlike my other methods of detachment, this escape benefits everyone — my family is sustained, Lisa evades a chore she detests, and I get to spend 30 to 120 minutes in mental solitude, listening to adult contemporary music while gently squeezing baguettes.

I've even come to understand the personalities and quirks of all our local grocers: The "Really, who pays attention to the price of a nectarine?" covert price gouging of Gelson's. The Trader Joe's clerks who all operate on exactly the same mystifying frequency, so much so that it wouldn't surprise me if I walked into TJ's one day and discovered all of the employees peacefully deceased, with a poisoned pumpkin cream Joe-Joe cookie dangling from their lifeless hands. The neighborhood health-food market that always has at least one wiry 70-year-old in jogging shorts. Any and all of those will do in a pinch, but none is perfect — because none of them is Whole Foods.

Much has been said about this chain of supermarkets, not all of it kind. For me, it's practically a spiritual guide, showing me how close I already am to peak living, if only I'd reach out my arms and let joy tumble into my cart. One can be distracted by the presentation and curation of Whole Foods' inventory — the dew that seems almost hand-painted on cherries, the absence of obnoxious and distracting brands — but then you'd miss the sheer volume of goods. Steam trays overstuffed with chana masala and sesame tofu. Freshly made blackened salmon fillets stacked one upon the other, endlessly replenished. Turmeric in my latte? Sure, I'll wince through half a cup because I so love the effort. Even with the rare miss — might be time to retire that creamy raw broccoli salad? — it hardly matters because they've made so goddamn much. As the person responsible for most of my family's meals, it gives me great pleasure to see mountains of food, all prepared by someone who isn't me. Do you have any idea what repetitive torture it is to make a simple tabbouleh salad? And yet here are 50 pounds of it.

Like any noteworthy vacation, upon leaving Whole Foods I feel recharged, and not just because I was eating chocolate-covered cherries out of the bag the entire time I shopped. I hurry back to my family with souvenirs for my children (gummi rabbits and dried strawberries) and for Lisa (emergency wine). Once home, I clock Lisa's bedraggled expression, then push past her into the kitchen to unload the groceries, thinking to myself, *Wow, I'm a pretty terrible father and husband — but an excellent provider.*

THE CAREGIVING DAUGHTER WHO LEAVES TOWN IN A CAMPER

My mom is 90, and I've been caring for her for four or five years. I'm not sure why it feels so difficult. It's not physically difficult. But I went from raising my kids and putting them first to putting my mother first, over my own health and needs. I've been thinking about moving her into care recently, and I think, *Well, this is not that bad.* But it's emotionally difficult to watch somebody age minute by minute.

My husband and I have a camper, and during the summer, we camp every three weeks. It used to be once or twice in the summer or fall. But now, if I start talking about being overwhelmed, my husband will say, "Why don't we go next weekend?" Sometimes we'll go for one or two nights.

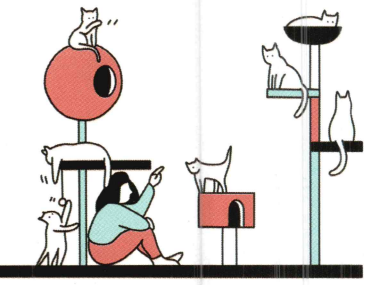
At home, I feel like I'm holding my breath all the time, and when we get away, I can breathe. I can sit in a chair and listen to the water. I live in a beautiful place. I'm sure there are birds around, but I'm so focused on other people. At home, my husband and I are never alone. In the truck, it's just the two of us. We're not talking about my mother's care or my frustrations. We're talking about us, where we'd like to see ourselves in five years.

I used to call home all the time to make sure everything is OK. Then I thought, *I can't do anything from where I am.* I have to know that what I put in place is secure. I have to put it in a box and put it out of my mind. — *Debra McHugh, Salem, Oregon*

When we get away, I can breathe. "

As told to Elise Craig
Illustrations by Elena Xausa

THE 9-YEAR-OLD TWINS WHO HIDE FROM EACH OTHER



When you're a twin, there's always going to be one person talking. And the other person has an idea. They want to talk, but I want to talk. And then your parent says, "Hold on, I'm talking to your twin." And you have to wait. For a single child, the focus is always on them, but the mom might have another baby, then not all the attention will be on you. Being twins, that's how it's going to be all your life.

My twin and I do a lot of our stuff together, but sometimes it's nice to have a break. Getting alone time can be hard. But when I find the time, I'll squeeze myself back in our cat's area. It's a cat tree, with beds. There are scratching poles and a dark area where a cat can crawl in and have a nap. I'm the only one who can fit in there — just me and my tuxedo kitty, Turbo. I can sit and read or watch shows. I can draw. I can write. It's right next to the couch, so I can reach up and grab my blanket and a pillow and rest there.

When I'm in there, my brother, Eli, doesn't get jealous. He has his own things to do. Unless he's trying to come talk to me and get me out, but he can't really fit. — *Sonja Dieter, Springfield, Oregon*

Sometimes at school when we play together, I feel like I'm bored. I just want to play with my other friends. So once in a while, I run away and play with them. — *Eli Dieter, Springfield, Oregon*

THE AU PAIR WHO FINDS PRIVACY IN PUBLIC

Space makes a difference: the house you are in, the bedroom you have. When I was with a different family, I had the basement and a shower just for me. So when I was in my bedroom, no one could hear me when I called friends or my parents in France. I didn't hear the kids when they woke up. I felt free. This house I am in now, all the bedrooms are on the same level. I don't feel like I'm off work, even when I'm in my room.

The rule for au pairs is that you only work 45 hours per week, with a max of ten hours per day. But when you live with a family, they are your boss. You eat dinner with them. If I want to watch a movie, I'm with the kids. If you want to sleep in on Saturday and Sunday morning, you can't — they come in and they're playing.

With my first family in San Francisco, I could go in and out through the garage. They didn't notice. They said, "In the morning, we need you at 8. You know your job." But when I first started with my current family, they wanted me home at 10:30 every night. In the beginning, I said yes. Then two weeks after I arrived, I said, "You picked me because I'm mature. I can go out."

I have to leave the house to take a break from the family and have privacy. When I'm off work, I like to go to the cinema, where I can watch a movie in a quiet space. Sometimes, when I'm out and see other kids crying and the parents arrive, I think, *Very nice. I'm not with those kids.* I can just walk away. — *Estelle Goncales, San Francisco*

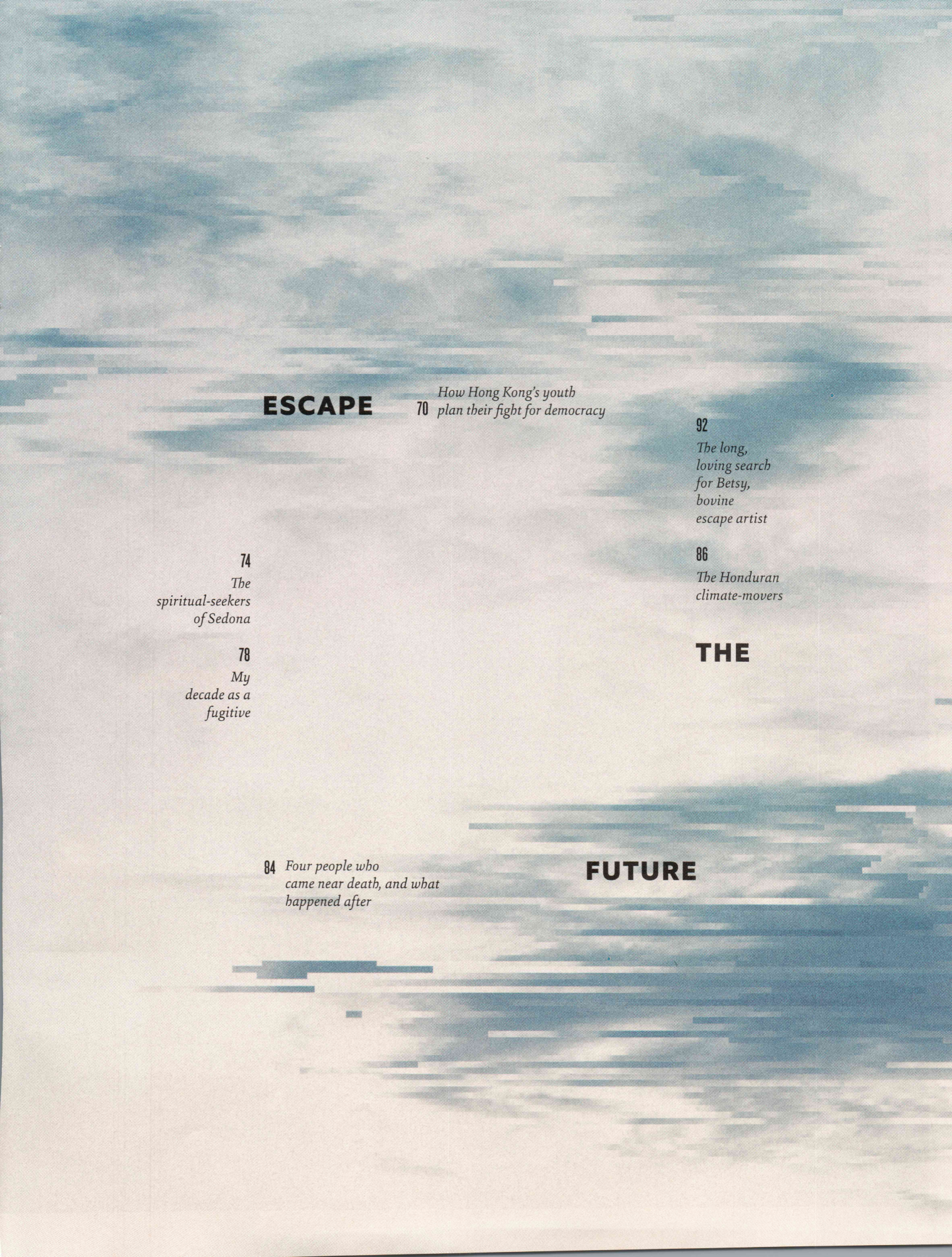
THE FOSTER KID WHO LOSES HERSELF IN BOOKS

I entered the system at 7 or 8, and I've been in 54 foster homes or treatment centers by my count. You never know what the family is going to be like. They can be nice at first, but you have to keep your guard up. You're watching for the tiniest movements to see if they're OK.

When you're in a foster home, you don't have anything of yours. Everything you're using — the towels, the stove — is theirs. I wanted something of mine. So at every foster home I've gone to, I've taken two books — books just lying around — and collected them in this bin. There were foster homes where, when I got home from school, my bags were gone and I'd go back to the Office of Children's Services. I lost my stuff all the time. It got stolen or thrown away. But my books always seemed to travel with me.

When I read, I can put myself in a situation better than my own. Right now, I'm reading a book about a girl who can see the dead and communicate with them. She felt like she was alone, and then she found other people who stand by her. A series I read over and over is about a girl who can't touch anyone because her touch causes extreme pain. No one accepts her, and she's scared of herself. She's missing out on things going on in the world.

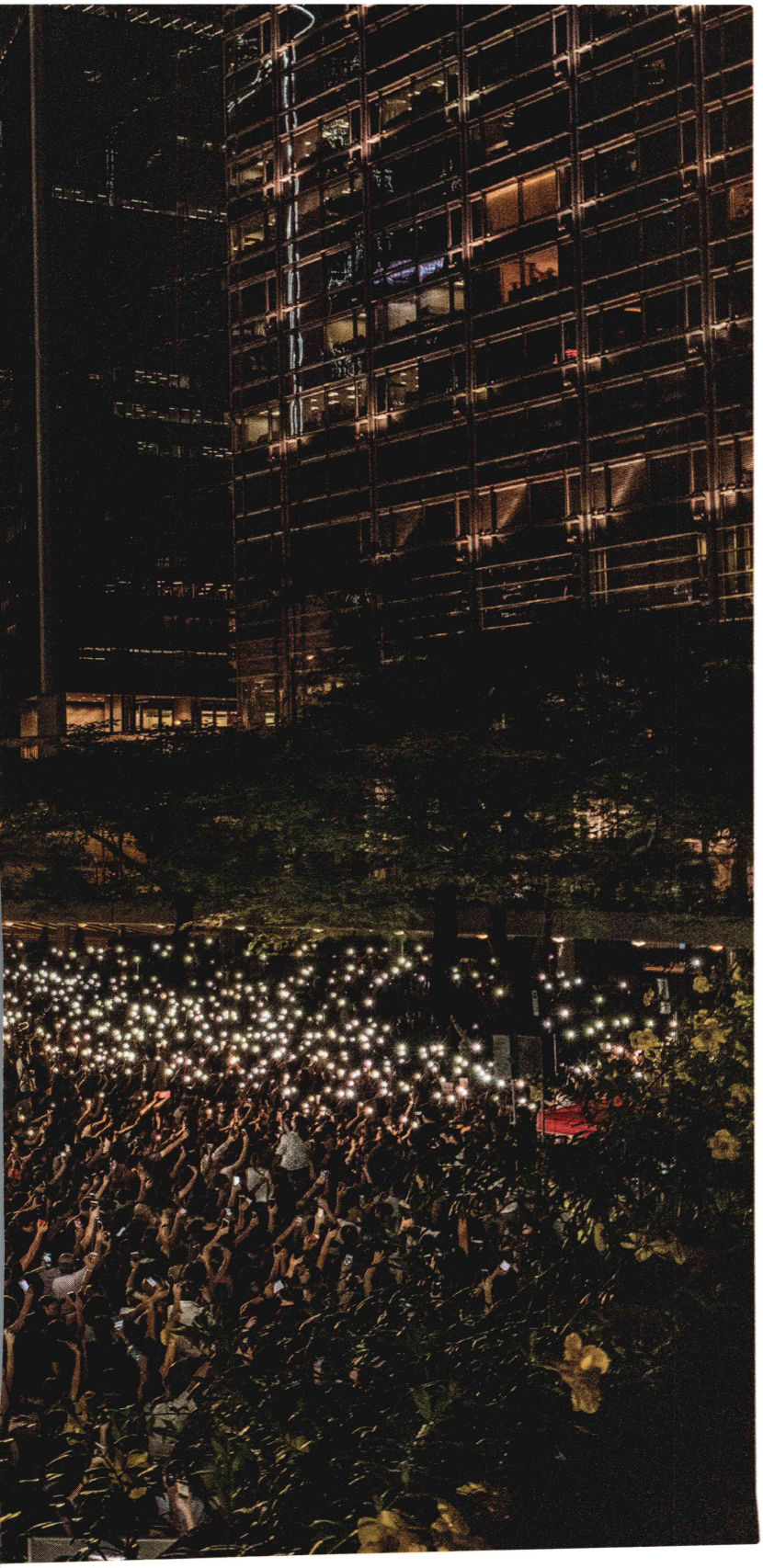
I've been in the home I'm in now for two years. Little by little, I'm letting books go. I'm giving them away. I've chosen to stay in foster care until 21. By the time I'm 21, I'll probably only have 20 books left. — *Jyasia Batts, Anchorage, Alaska*



“ You’ll never wall

k alone.

How Hong Kong's youth plan their fight for democracy



By Timothy McLaughlin and Tiffany Liang

Photographs by Xyza Cruz Bacani

"As long as you are not scared and you are not afraid to challenge the authorities, you are part of the revolution," one user posted in July on LIHKG, a stripped-down anonymous message board. For months, millions have gathered in the streets of Hong Kong — through clouds of tear gas and despite more than a thousand arrests — to protest China's increasing control over the territory. In that time, LIHKG has transformed into an outlet where people can not only organize marches but also express more-intimate concerns — about their relationships, families, and prospects for the future.

After a spate of suicides, LIHKG became a forum to discuss mental health. When protesters suspicious of the police wanted to change the route of a planned rally, they went to the site to make their case. When demonstrators stormed the Legislative Council building in early July, one commented that he didn't believe it was happening because he hadn't read about it on LIHKG first. And when a young woman lamented her unsupportive father, LIHKG members offered their support instead. →

← A protest in Central District, Hong Kong

"My dad is a typical fan of the pro-establishment camp and an extremely chauvinistic and possessive guy. My family has not gotten along well with him since I was young, but my mother didn't divorce him for the sake of me and my younger sister.

I have been going to the protests, and my mother helped me keep it secret, but my father found out, and we argued for days. He told me that politics has nothing to do with me, and China is what it is today because of the Communist Party. He also said only Hong Kongers would be reckless enough to go against their government and a lot of other nonsense.

One day, he told me, 'If you want to go to the protests, you better move out and you are not my daughter anymore.' I said, 'Do you think I want to stay in this kind of family?' But later, things changed. I ended up kicking him out instead. I said, 'We are fed up with dealing with you.' My father was gone the next day. It has been a month since he left. To be honest, I felt relieved at first. But recently, I have been wondering if I went too far. He's still my father, after all, and not a bad one. It's just that he's too self-centered and difficult. Was I too mean? Did I do the right thing?"

RESPONSES

You did nothing wrong.

Be careful. He may find another woman in mainland China and bring her back to HK, then steal your house. Those women are good at that.

If I were you, I would change the lock on the gate.

Maybe your relationship will become better since you don't live together.

You can give him a little money for his survival, since he's your father. It's not your problem whether he accepts it or not. His personality and opinions are not going to change, so don't try to force it if you can't get along.

Our fathers are the same kind of people. They'll never admit they're wrong. I moved out from my home when I was 19 years old and never went back. My mom asked me to apologize to my dad, but I refused to do that because I don't think I did anything wrong.

You have done something that most of us want to do.

My father also left my family due to our different political views.

You can invite him to tea and dim sum even though you two don't live together.

Why not try to influence him to think like you? Just like what I did to my mother. I've succeeded.

You are damn brave!

↓ Police officers in riot gear

"How should I prepare if I go to the protest in Yuen Long tomorrow?" [In late July, bystanders and protesters were attacked by an armed mob. Forty-five people were injured. In this post, a young woman asked about attending a protest to denounce the violence.]

RESPONSES

Put on your down jacket.

Go to the shopping mall nearby.

Follow the leader/flow/the majority of us.

If you see a strong guy, just follow him and stick with him!

Eat food on the streets and take a rest in Yuen Long. I am at your service and by your side.

I live in Tuen Mun. Please feel free to contact me. I have a room. I can help others, too.

Go with me.

"As an owner of a company, I need to make an announcement regarding three things:

First, on August 5, my company will go on strike because I need to join the protest.

Second, we do business with the pro-establishment camp. I am willing to donate profits from those orders.

Third, if, unfortunately, those who have been arrested are found guilty, after they complete their time in jail, I will give them priority when hiring.

I am hoping that all of the business owners in Hong Kong make this pledge. We need to help those fighting on the front line so that they don't have to worry about what happens in the future.

Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times."

RESPONSES

You are a company with a social conscience.

The third point is the most useful because this will give the front-line protesters some sense of protection.

Tell us what type of business you do so we can support you.

Can you please hire me?

Thank you.

"A lot of things have happened in the past month. I have been to most of the protests since June 10. On top of that, there are relationships, high school exams, and my love life. People asked me to talk to a classmate who was thinking about committing suicide. But I don't think I have the capacity to do that. I just feel so tired. Can someone please give me some encouragement so I can keep on going?"

RESPONSES

We are together!

Nobody will blame you if you stop to rest. We can walk farther after a rest.

If you have anything to talk about, just post it and let us know. Please do not hide yourself in the corner.

I want to cry, to lose myself, but I have cried for almost a whole month. I became numb, and now there are no more tears.

What you should do right now is drink a cup of milk or water with honey, then go to sleep. Go for a run and have breakfast after you wake up. Please do not look at the news or LIHKG posts anymore. Make sure you can fully relax.

Take a deep breath and relax. Imagine you are by the seaside, on the grass, in the forest, or wherever you want to go. Relax from your eyebrow to your toes, relax.

You'll never walk alone.

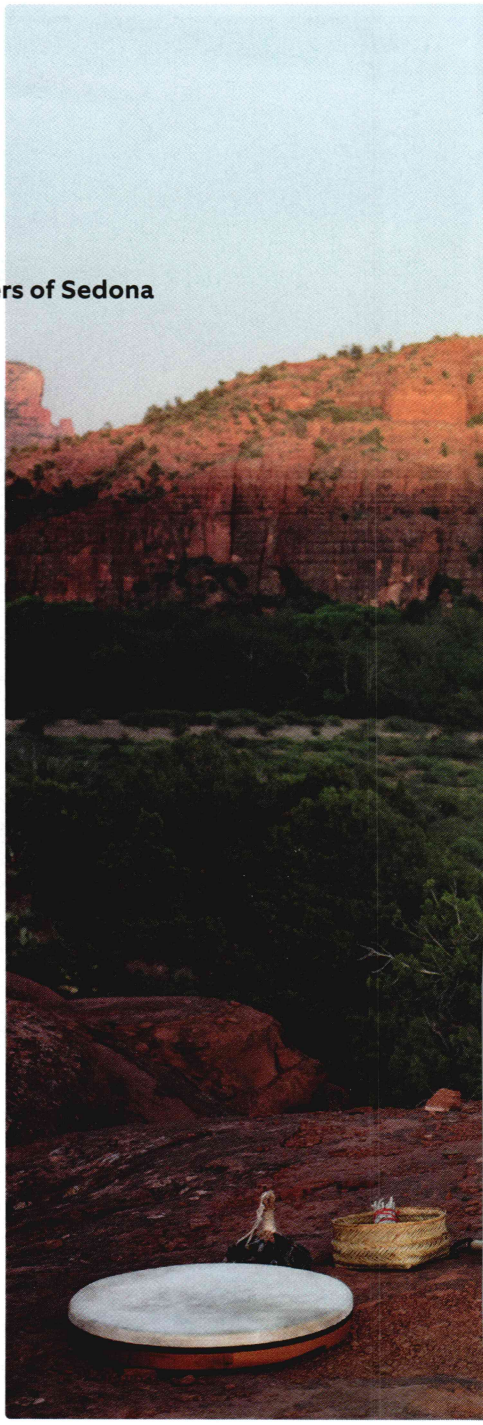
**Posts have been translated and edited for length and clarity.*

Additional reporting by Anna Kam

“I’m going to sit under my giant oak tree

The spiritual-seekers of Sedona

Photographs and text by Lucas Foglia



On the edge of Sedona, Arizona, a purple building announces itself with a big hand-painted sign: CENTER FOR THE NEW AGE. The air outside smells like traffic and incense. On the wall inside, near shelves full of crystals, jewelry, and self-help books, is a grid of faces, each advertising a psychic reader, aura photographer, or UFO tour guide.

Sedona became the nucleus of the New Age movement in the 1980s, when local psychic Page Bryant popularized the term “vortex.” Bryant believed that the Earth itself is alive, that there are sacred places in Sedona where the physical and spiritual planes connect, and that those connections result in swirling electromagnetic energy. In 1987, thousands of New Agers came for the Harmonic Convergence, an astrological event that was supposed to bring universal peace and love. The most tangible result from that night: Many never left.

For decades, more people continued to arrive, to heal and to be healed. According to the Vortex Map available in the lobby of every hotel in town, there are four main energy vortexes in Sedona. They now attract 3 million visitors annually. In the high season, tourists outnumber the city’s 10,500 residents 3-to-1. As more come, Sedona, too, has changed. Longtime resident Barbara Matsuura, who practices reiki and qi gong, works from a quiet studio and garden in her home. A few months ago, the forest behind her house was cut to clear the ground for a 6,500-square-foot building, a future rental property for spiritual retreats, with eight bedrooms, three bunkrooms, and ten bathrooms.

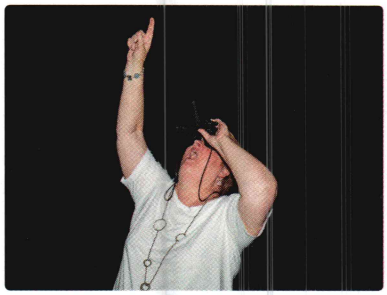
Today, the Center for the New Age is one of many such hubs in Sedona. Throughout the area, healers offer a range of services: Poranguí McGrew does sound healing with a didgeridoo. June Rettinger de Arballo offers Native American–inspired blessing ceremonies. Jenna Gene LeVee does pet reiki. Marrian “Sista” Efua leads Inner Healing Retreats for women of color. Elizabeth Silk brings clients to her custom indoor sweat lodge.

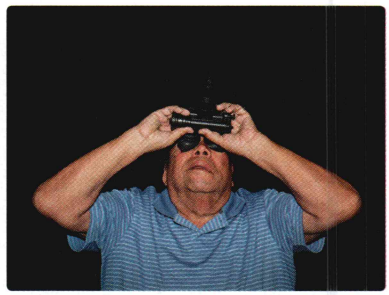
Tourists visit in search of a reprieve but also a transformation, a way to start experiencing the world differently. Waiting for a UFO tour to begin, Estella Matthews says, “Every time you turn on the TV station, somebody got shot. You don’t hear about any of the good stuff anymore. There’s just so much negativity around us. There needs to be something more positive that we just don’t know about yet, and it could be in outer space.”

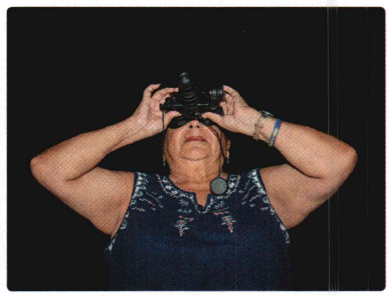
After a forest bathing session at L’Auberge de Sedona, Jenn O’Brien says, “Living in the Hudson Valley, nature is in my backyard, and I don’t use it. Going home, I’m going to the creek behind my house. I’m going to sit under my giant oak tree and be more present, and a little bit more grounded, and thankful.” →

↓ Ashley Klein does energy-field massage while Poranguí McGrew plays didgeridoo during a Music Is Medicine retreat. The purpose of the retreat is to use sound "to send love to that part of us that is hurt, angry, and self-destructive," says McGrew. "Once we can start to love that place, there is an inkling of what is possible."

and be more present.







← "'If a UFO lands,' I always say, 'check your watches.' You're gonna have missing time. You're going to have an abduction," says Melinda Leslie (*top left*), who takes tourists on UFO-sighting tours. "We can learn from these other beings, and we can develop as a human species. We're all fleas on the same dog. We share one atmosphere, and we all have to be concerned about its well-being."

"There needs to be something more positive that we just don't kn

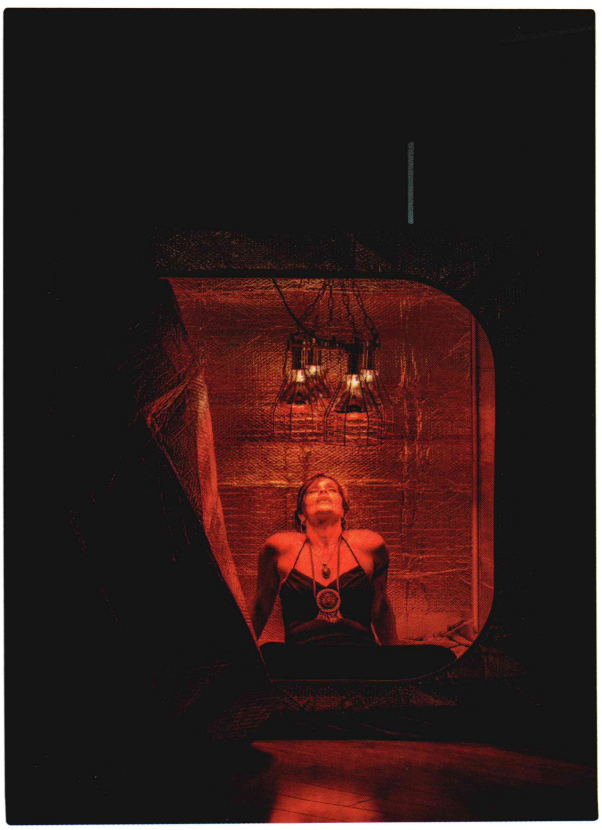
↓ Elizabeth Silk, whose father is Sioux, meditates in her custom indoor sweat lodge, which she advertises on Airbnb.

…w about yet, and it could be in outer space."

↑ "I've worn a lot of hats. I've been an engineer. I've been an inventor. Then I went on sabbatical," says Jenna Gene LeVee, who now does reiki on both humans and animals, including Unumunu the dog (*pictured*). "As I approach my client, I tune into their highest spiritual purpose and good."

→ "I grew up through segregation. But there is a different quality of meanness now," says Diane Hampton, who attended an Inner Healing Retreat. "Retreats like this help bring you back into your core values."

← June Rettinger de Arballo performs a Native American–inspired blessing ceremony at Enchantment Resort. De Arballo, whose mother is Mexican Apache, says tourists "want something authentic. They want something traditional from a culture that goes back centuries."



It's funny sharing my story, since I spent the better part of a decade doing everything I could to hide it. I'd lie straight out of the gate each time I met someone new — tell them my name was D.J. or Ángel or some other alias, but my name is Waymond Hall. My family calls me Little Way because of my dad. He was Big Way. I think I was 17 years old when I first reconnected with him. I hadn't seen him since I was a toddler, so I wasn't sure what to expect. But even locked up, he was a formidable man.

At the time, he was at Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, California. Level four, which means no warning shots from the guard towers. One time, I arrived a little late for visiting hours, and the vending machines were sold out of frozen barbecue chicken. Big Way strolled over to an inmate who had a few boxes and returned with two for us. He hadn't had much success in the outside world, but he had earned respect in prison. There were times when I thought I might end up like him. That night up in the treetop, I was sure of it.

I remember that tree like it was yesterday. I spent eight hours overnight perched 50 feet up. My heart was pounding in my ears but not enough to drown out the sounds of dogs and sirens. They were on my tail, and I sat there crouched in the branches, watching the cherry and blueberry light show and praying that spotlight wouldn't land on me. I was doing everything in my power not to move, but I couldn't stop a leg from shaking. *This is it*, I thought. *I've turned out just like my dad.*

One evening in 2005, in Santa Barbara, I committed a home invasion and armed robbery. I was still Waymond Hall then. I had no reason to change my name yet.

My partner and I spotted the two men we believed were drug dealers through a narrow opening in their front door. We stormed in and saw four more people, their faces looking in horror at my rifle and me. After all the drinking we'd done earlier that day, I had lost whatever senses would've told me that what we were doing was stupid.

I have been robbed twice at gunpoint. You stay down and do as you're told. But while we were moving the dealers from room to room at gunpoint, looking for weed and cash, the four others bolted out the back. Like the drunk idiots we were, we panicked and took off.

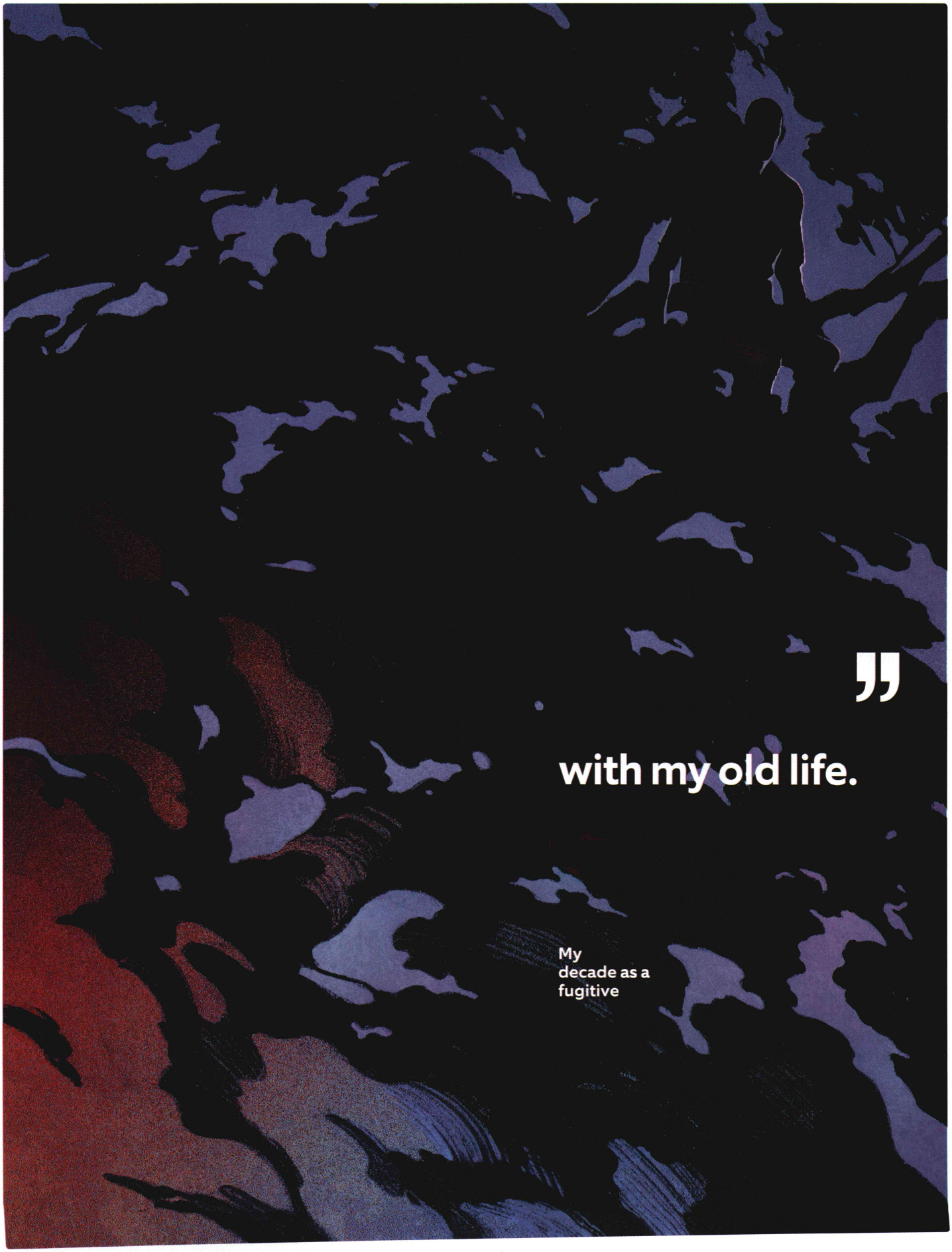
I avoided anything having to do

By Waymond Hall with Jane Greenberg

Illustrations by Hokyoung Kim

Soon we were fleeing at 114 miles per hour down a one-way street. The getaway car was my mother's 1990 Corolla. The getaway driver was my old high school friend Ben, the scruffy blond who always wore the same Oakland A's windbreaker. Ben took a turn going 80 miles per hour, skidded wide, and crashed into the curb. I ran — hard. I jumped two fences and waded through chest-deep water down a ravine. I scrambled up a wall to get out and then climbed higher into a tree than I ever had. I hid there, shivering.

The next morning, I climbed down, walked toward the beach, and listened to the waves as my mother's car lay wrecked in a lot, its registration linked to one Waymond Hall. I reached into my pocket and found the weed I had


”
with my old life.
My
decade as a
fugitive

I'd call my mom fr

stolen the night before, still dry in a plastic bag. I sold $50 worth and bought a Greyhound ticket to take me out of Santa Barbara. I would not return for a decade.

Just two years earlier, I was a student at UC Santa Barbara and the only person on my father's side to go to college. I knew him mostly through the letters he wrote me. He and other prisoners call letters "kites," and I imagined them flying over the razor wire of Coalinga.

My mom tells me that when I was a baby, Big Way and I were tight. *Skin to skin*, she'd say. *Inseparable.* That was right up until the last time I saw him as a free man. I watched him slap her down and kick her, but I couldn't do anything about it. I was only 2. He was 6 feet 6 inches, and my mom is 5 feet 3 inches, but her will was as big as his body. She packed up me and my baby sister and escaped to a battered-women's shelter. From there, we bounced around Oakland until she landed on her feet. Welfare helped with rent and food but didn't do much for the pain of losing my dad.

I didn't understand why I couldn't see him. My mom would tell me he was far away. To my toddler brain, this seemed to be a simple matter of transportation. "Couldn't he come by boat or train or plane?" I would ask. I didn't realize then that we were actually running from him. In 1990, he committed back-to-back armed robberies, which landed him in prison, and this time he was sentenced to 39 years.

Big Way was no stranger to the pen. He cycled in and out, for robbery, for burglary. That's where he and my mom first met. Perhaps not the most romantic spot for a first date, but that's where it began — the visitation room at San Quentin. My mom was 24, idealistic, politically motivated, and naïve. She had recently moved to San Francisco from a conservative Mormon home in Boise. She was looking for change, and she found it. It was the 1970s and things were poppin'. She got involved in a prison letter-writing campaign and typed letters to a political prisoner at Quentin who passed one on to my father. He wrote her back. When my dad was released from Quentin, he paroled to her spot in the city. I came along just about 9 months later.

To an outsider looking in, I was born destined for prison — poor, black, and with a dad behind bars for most of my life. But my mom was determined that I escape that fate. She'd put herself through Mills College and became a public school teacher. She cared about education and instilled those values in me and my sister. When I was accepted to UC Santa Barbara straight from the Oakland public school system, it was cause for celebration. In my world, making it out was huge.

Me and Santa Barbara, though — not a good fit. Santa Barbara was the opposite of Oakland. Wealthy and white. While I could compete academically, I excelled at the party scene. And while I'd never known the police in Oakland, I racked up a number of misdemeanors at UCSB pretty quick, always involving alcohol and fighting.

One of those charges got my visiting privileges with my father revoked. No more catching up over frozen barbecue. It was tough losing him a second time, but I made it through. When I handed my mother my diploma in black studies, she was validated. Instead of following in my dad's footsteps, I was following in hers.

Degree in hand, I headed for my old junior high school in East Oakland and was offered a job teaching math. They were even going to pay for my credentialing. Then they ran a background check. My fingerprints showed the record I'd picked up in Santa Barbara, and the administration retracted its offer. I was 24, angry, and broke. So I tried on my father's shoes instead.

After I climbed down that tree and left Santa Barbara, I vanished into East Oakland. I avoided anything having to do with my old life, even most of my old friends. I'd call my mom from pay phones and arrange a meeting spot every couple weeks. She never knew exactly where I lived, but she helped me, handed me a few hundred dollars here and there, and kept me from sleeping in the park.

om pay phones and arrange a meeting spot every couple weeks.

We went to see a lawyer together. A good lawyer. She said it would cost $100,000 to represent me, and as she spoke, her eyes were locked solely on my mother. If I looked over, I knew my mother's expression would read, *Way, if I had it, I would do it.* I learned three things from that meeting: If and when I was arrested, I would be using a public defender; I had an armed-and-dangerous attachment

Waymond Hall with his mother and father in the early '80s. His father returned to prison in 1983 and 1992.

to my warrant, which meant the police were allowed to shoot me if I attempted to run; and I had officially broken my mother's heart.

So I stayed hidden in Oakland, where the violent-crime rate back then was more than three times the national average. In those days, few in East Oakland would ask questions, let alone pry. When I asked contractors to pay me in cash, they didn't ask questions, either. At first, I didn't bring much to the teams but hard labor. Never before had I been so dependent on a job for survival. I started out doing demolition work. Eventually, I learned plumbing and electrical. I developed real skills and was trusted to use them.

I moved out of motels and into places around MacArthur Boulevard. On 79th Street, I lived next to a single mother with two young boys and became close with Dayln, the younger one. When he saw me go to work in the morning, I imagined being a role model.

One day, I left my door wide open, and Dayln peered in. I quickly pushed him out but not before catching his confused look. He had seen that my apartment was completely barren.

I spent nights on the floor with my feet facing the door. In some cultures, this has a connotation of death because coffins get taken away feet first. I worried more about stray bullets flying from that direction. One of my closest friends was Zach. We knew each other since school, where we played junior varsity basketball together. Although he was a year younger than me, I confided in him, and he had my back. When he was shot and killed on 50th Avenue, I lay curled up for five days.

I learned humility in those years. I felt that I could be killed or lose my freedom at any moment. I had 13 felony counts against me. If I got caught, I'd be looking at a long stretch. Maybe they'd put me with my dad. We could be cellies.

I had a few close calls. I was pulled over in Contra Costa County, and the officer handcuffed me and began searching my pockets. When he found just a single wood chip, he opened the trunk and discovered my shovels and plumbing tools. Then he let me go without looking up my record. He never told me why he had stopped me in the first place.

Shortly after a neighbor of mine was killed in our driveway on 79th Street, I moved to another apartment. It was in the Murder Dubs section of Oakland. A $20 bill was called a dub, so 20th to 29th avenues were known as The Dubs. The "Murder" part of the name speaks for itself. Early one morning, I was waiting at the bus stop for my sister. I heard sirens approaching. Several

I had never outrun that evening in Santa Barbara. I had only prolonged the inevitable. Before leaving for work, I would often watch my beautiful wife and newborn daughter sleeping. I'd kiss them goodbye, wondering if it would be the last time. I was always thinking, *They will break down the door of your home and drag you away. You will die in prison, just like your father.*

Nearly ten years after my crime, I walked into a courthouse in Santa Barbara and surrendered. When it came time to see the judge, I noticed that my file was taller than the caseload for the rest of the day. Most defendants in the courtroom had only minor infractions. I could feel their eyes turn to me as my charges were read. I put my hands in my suit pockets to keep them from shaking while the judge went on: weapons possession. Armed robbery. Home invasion.

I felt that I could be killed or lose my freedom at any moment.

police cars screeched to a halt. Suddenly, guns were drawn. I remembered the lawyer's advice to never run.

I was placed in handcuffs, as was one other man who had also been at the bus stop. We happened to both be wearing brown pants. The police tried to put me into a squad car, but I kept my feet out so they couldn't close the door on me. Through the window, I saw someone crying hysterically. It was my sister, who had gotten off the bus.

Then another squad car pulled up, and a person in the back seat pointed at the other man, not me. I was saved by the witness.

Two years passed. Fewer and fewer people in my life had ever known me as Waymond. I developed a stutter and severe insomnia. I had high blood pressure. Drinking became my favorite pastime. After work, I'd buy a bottle and then another.

Against all good sense, I reached out to my junior high sweetheart, Kim, online. We talked until 6 a.m. the first night we reconnected. I thought we'd resume our friendship, but anything more was out of the question. I was a fugitive, and she was a single mother with two boys, Daniel and Dante. But soon, we were in love again.

I worked construction jobs and commuted by train two hours every weekend to see Kim and the boys in Sacramento. Her home was a refuge for me. We'd both been through a lot, but we could be our old selves together on those weekends. There was no fronting. After four years together, Kim and I had a daughter, and we named her Ella Samone. At first, I was petrified to sign the birth certificate, but of course I did. Kim and I exchanged our wedding vows under a huge oak tree, but going to the courthouse to sign a marriage certificate was too risky. Still, we'd become a family. I took my stepsons to soccer, and my daughter to see her grandmother. I almost felt normal, but the feeling would pass as soon as someone new would ask me my name. My answer was never the truth.

The whole charade ended when I received two phone calls. The first was from my mom, panicking because she'd been sent a renewal of my warrant. The second call was even more serious. I learned that a large crew of U.S. Marshals had gone to my mom's house, guns drawn, looking for me.

I faced 44 years to life, but when it came time to sentence me, the judge cited my family, my steady work, my character references, and most importantly, ten years being crime-free. He took mercy. I was given a 22-year suspended prison term and a strict ten-year probation, which meant that a single mistake would send me away without trial. The first requirement of my probation was a two-year residential program at the Delancey Street Foundation. I had to put the bottle down.

Those were the terms. Ten years to the very day I started my life as a fugitive, I signed the paperwork and became Waymond Hall again.

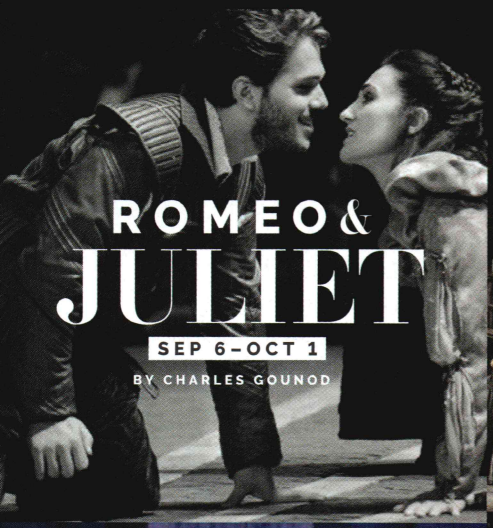
I was rarely sober, not even on the day I showed up to Delancey Street for the first time. My blood pressure was so high that I was almost turned away. Once in, I was on my feet 17 hours a day doing multiple jobs. As hard as it was, it was a safe place to reflect. I never got to say goodbye to my father, and I think about him every day and all the ways I am not like him. He died in prison the year before his only granddaughter was born.

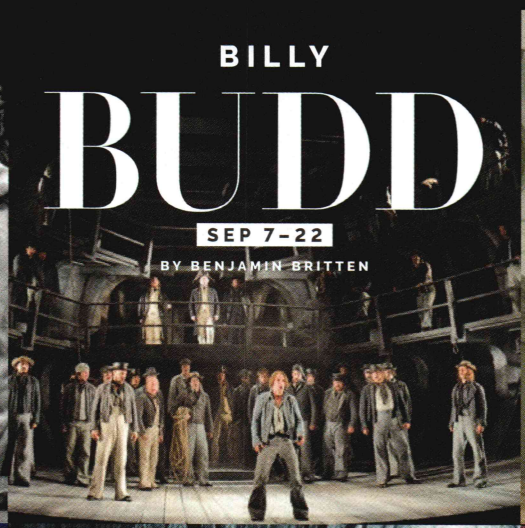
One day at Delancey, I heard a familiar voice call me. It was Ben — my childhood friend and my getaway driver. He had gone through the program after a seven-month jail stint and was there to visit. I learned that he had married his old sweetheart, just one week before Kim and I were married, and they had a daughter together. They had named her Ella.

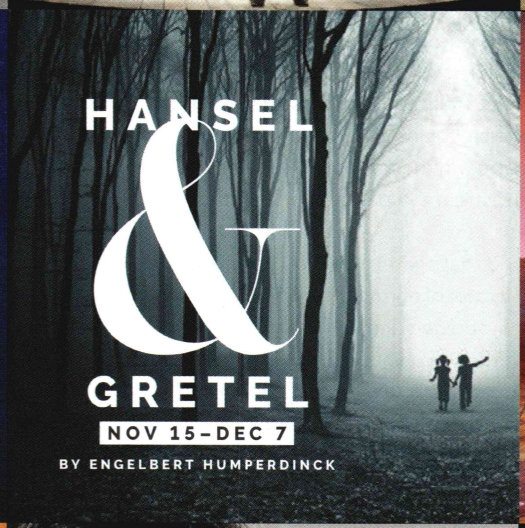
We parted that day but made plans to keep in touch. I could do that sort of thing. I could think about the future again.

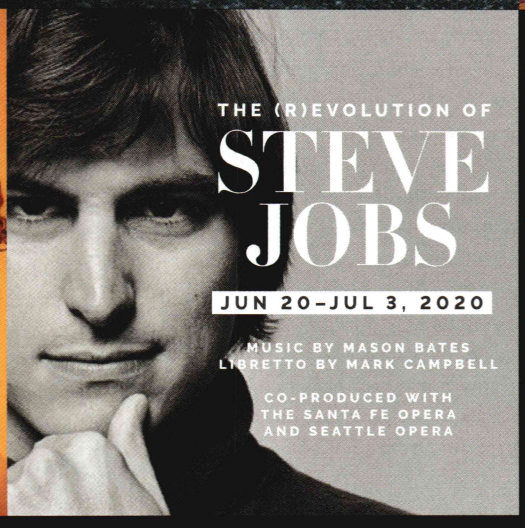
Waymond Hall is the subject of the documentary *The Surrender of Waymond Hall*, to be released in 2020.

ESCAPE INTO GRIPPING STORIES AND SOARING MUSIC.









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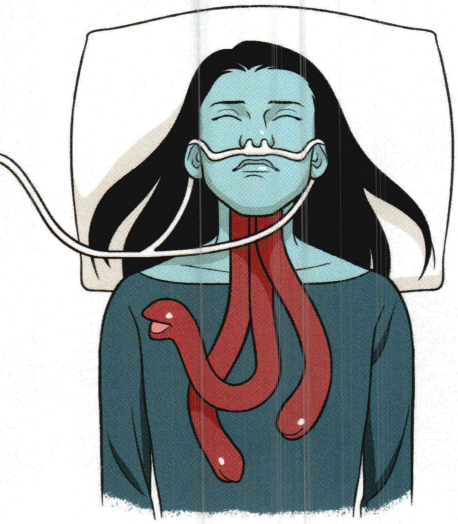
All performances feature English supertitles. All dates, prices, programs, artists, and productions subject to change. Tickets subject to availability.

I had a 3 percent chance of survival.

Four people who came near death, and what happened after

As told to Andy Wright
Illustrations by Anuj Shrestha



THE WOMAN WHO WAS IN A MEDICAL COMA FOR THREE WEEKS

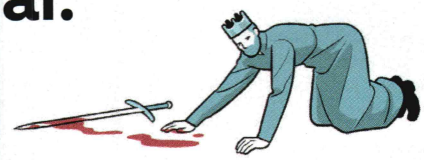
I was super healthy before all this happened. But in October 2017, I ended up having to go in for an emergency surgery to have my gallbladder removed. I stayed at the hospital a week and couldn't figure out why — most people who get their gallbladders removed leave the next day. We found out later that the doctor had discharged me with undiagnosed sepsis — a really serious infection of your bloodstream — pancreatitis, and an 18-centimeter pseudocyst.

I ended up at a second hospital, and that's when the cyst ruptured. That, combined with the sepsis, ate away a lot of my organs. They opened me up, realized how bad it had gotten, and decided to induce me into a coma — I had to have about three-fifths of my intestines removed. The coma, which lasted three weeks, was to shut my body down to give everything a rest. Because I was going to have so many surgeries, they just left me open, though they put some mesh over the opening.

I have no memory of getting induced. But I dreamed that there was a reptile zoo that shared a wall with the hospital, and all their snakes had gotten out in the ICU. My scariest dream was that I had woken up to a 10-foot boa constrictor devouring me whole, and it was all the way up to the top of my thigh. I couldn't speak, I couldn't scream, and my call button wasn't working. So I was banging on the sides of my bed, trying to get the nurses to come in. And finally, they heard me and grabbed onto this snake, counted to three, and yanked it off.

I also dreamed that I had swallowed three snakes while I was sleeping, and, in the dream, I spent the whole next day throwing them up. Of course, it was just the wires: I had a trach tube that looked like a snake. They put things on your legs to keep your blood flowing, so that was the anaconda.

I don't remember this, but when my mom told me that I had been in a coma, I was pissed. I had a 3 percent chance of survival. I mean, that's low. I should be playing the lottery. — *Becca Burgess, Los Angeles*



THE MAN WHO HAS DIED MORE THAN 500 TIMES — ONSTAGE

The production I'm currently in is *Macbeth*, and in *Macbeth*, there's blood throughout. It's one of the main themes of the play. The word "fear" is said something like 32 times, and the word "blood" is said 21 times. I've died more than 500 times onstage, but this season I will only die 40 times.

You do the research early to see the way the body reacts when, say, a sword gets thrust into one's gut. The way the body's muscles will tense up around that weapon. You don't want to overdramatize or milk it. You try to make sure that you're dying appropriately. You think, *How would I react if I was about to plunge myself on my own sword?* Are there a lot of deep breaths right before you do it, or are you peaceful, calm? Are your eyes closed or open?

Dealing with blood is tricky in that it stains your skin. The food coloring and the corn syrup combination will leave a pinkish hue that lasts longer than you want. So we use a barrier lotion that auto mechanics wear that keeps the grease from soaking into their skin. In some of my quick changes, the people who dress me are literally washing off — with warm washcloths — the parts of my body that are bloody while I'm working on getting new socks or a shirt on. It's a team effort whenever there's a death onstage.

I played Iago last year, and he lives at the end. I found it harder to come down after that show. For big characters, death is an escape of sorts — they have worked themselves to a place where it's the only way out. For the actor, death gives you this kind of wonderful release where you can let that character go. You don't get that when a character lives. — *Danforth Comins, Ashland, Oregon*

THE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT WHO WAS SAVED BY AN UPSET STOMACH

Back in 1986, my school had this thing where we went and climbed Mount Hood. They had done these trips forever, and in the springtime, we did all these conditioning hikes in preparation. There were people who'd gone to this school their whole lives, but I had only been there a couple of months and was still the new kid.

We started early, 2 o'clock in the morning, and I was still not feeling great — I had bean dip the previous night that wasn't sitting well. Some parents had looked at the weather and said there was a big storm coming through. But the trip leader told them, "It's fine. We're going to go up and see how far we can go." So we start, and all you're doing is stepping into the step of the person before you. We got three-quarters of the way, and the steep part of the trail was coming. I finally was like, *I can't keep going.*

I tell the leader, "I think I'm done." And he says, "What, you're giving up on what could be the greatest moment of your life?" I'm like, *I'm 16. I haven't had sex. I've heard that's pretty cool.* Plus, I was new — I wasn't going to let this guy talk me into doing something I didn't want to do. So I headed back. Some people who had gone down before me had rented a room at a hotel, and I went there and slept.

Later, when we went outside, the sky was dark. We get on the bus, and the driver says, "Oh my God, it's really late. I've got to call the school. The others should be back by now." All of a sudden, these rescue people came. I thought the others were fine. I'm not a panicker. Then we learn a few days later that they found three bodies. They had frozen to death.

I felt horrible. I still feel horrible. The only person I saved was myself, but there was a woman there, the dean of students, who was struggling, and she could've come back with me. People talk about pushing themselves. But my mom had always told me, "Hey, if someone tells you to do something you don't want to do, don't do it." You have to know when to go back sometimes. — *John Whitson, Portland, Oregon*

I should be playing the lottery.

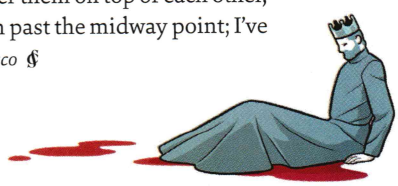
THE CYCLIST WHO WAS RUN OVER BY A TRUCK

I worked in downtown San Francisco, and I used to bike to work on Market Street. I remember my bike wheel was making a squeaky noise, and it had been raining for many weeks, and it was the first sunny day in January. I was waiting at a red light, and when it changed, I started biking across. Then this guy in a pickup truck full of cement made an illegal right turn. I remember my tire hitting the truck and being like, *Oh, s---.*

I went under the truck. Fortunately, I had a helmet on. The truck crossed my rib cage and broke my whole chest, and my ribs punctured my lungs. I remember looking at the sky, and it was so incredibly blue. I was super embarrassed that I was holding up traffic, and I was trying to get up. The person I remember coming to my aid, he was just some guy walking by. He had a goatee, and he held my hand. It's his kindness that chokes me up.

I've always been an artist, and I thought of myself as a darkroom photographer, and I couldn't physically do that anymore. It was hard to just wash my hair. So during my recovery, I was painting. It was this overwhelming emptiness that I was trying to deal with. I thought I shouldn't be alive. It wasn't that I wished I was dead; I just didn't understand why I was alive.

I started running again, too, about five years later. And one of the things I tell myself when I'm running is, *You're alive. You're lucky to be alive. You can breathe. You can move.* I decided to do this project where for a year I'd run a thousand miles, and I'd create these maps that would be about my relationship with San Francisco and just being alive. I go for a run, and I use Map My Run or Strava to track my route. At the end of the month, I take all of my maps and layer them on top of each other, and I stitch those onto a piece of fabric. I'm past the midway point; I've hit 500 miles. — *Margaret Timbrell, San Francisco*



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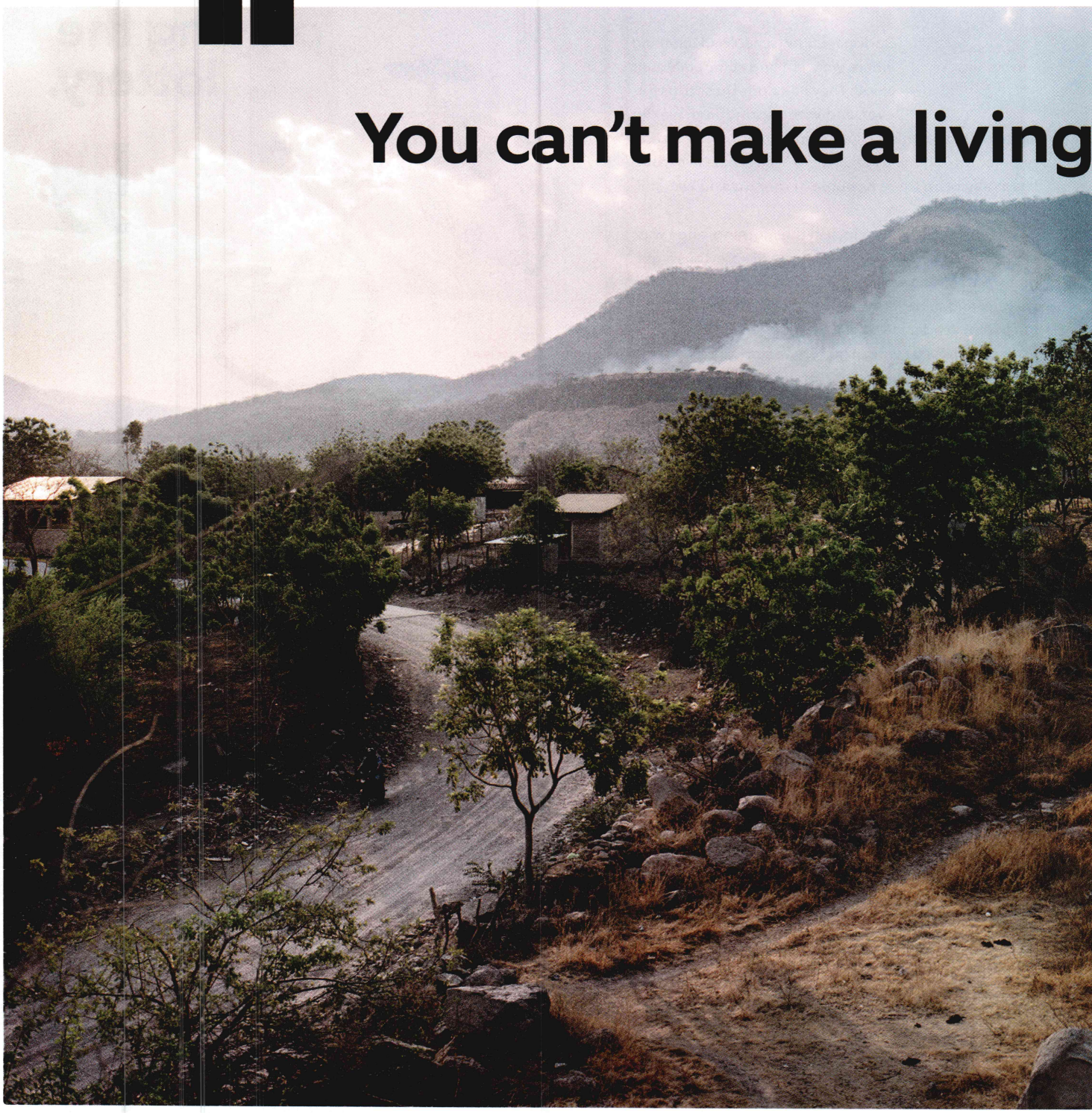
You can’t make a living



↑ A brush fire on the mountainside in Apacilagua, a village in southern Honduras in the heart of the Dry Corridor

→ Each year, thousands of farmers whose crops have dried up arrive outside the factories in Villanueva in search of work.

nere anymore.

The Honduran climate-movers

Photographs by Jordi Ruiz Cirera Text by Jeff Ernst

Te espero como *la lluvia de mayo.* I wait for you like the rain of May — a popular refrain among farmers in Central America, where the first rainfall in May long signaled the end of the dry season. But over the past decade, in what is known as the Central American Dry Corridor — a vast swath that stretches, unbroken, from Guatemala to northern Costa Rica — the rain is no longer guaranteed. Farmers who used to count on two harvests every year are now fortunate to get one.

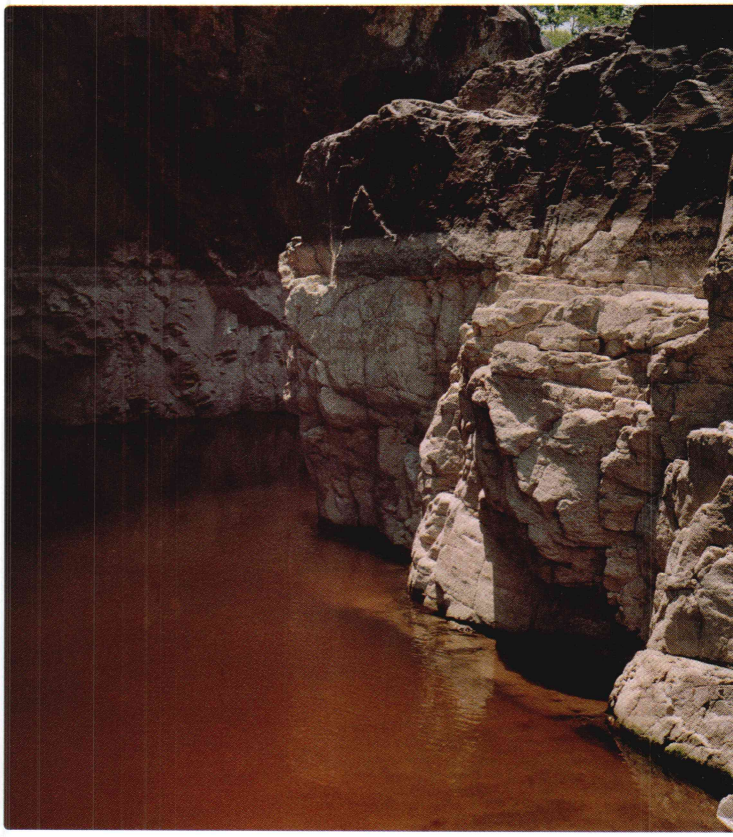
In southern Honduras, valleys that were once lush and fertile are now filled with stunted cornstalks and parched riverbeds. Adobe shacks erode on mountainsides, abandoned by those who left with no intention of returning.

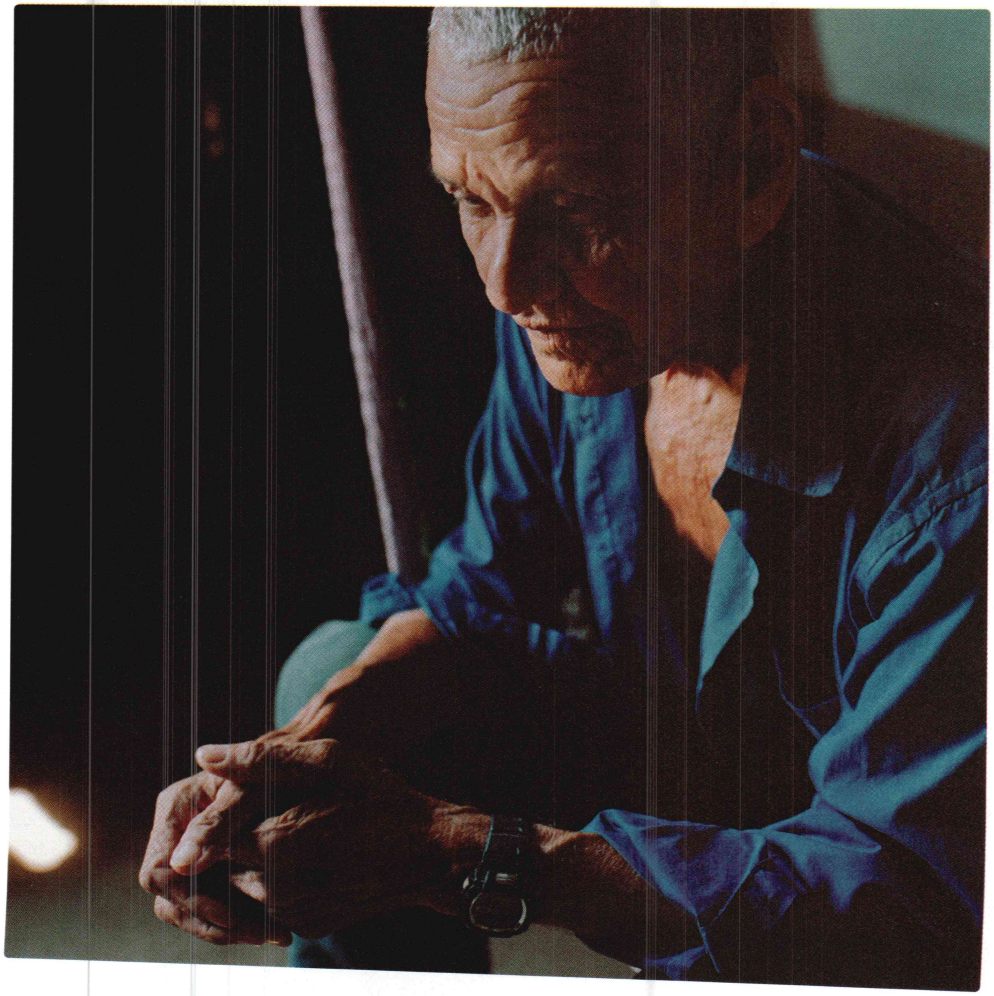
The droughts have forced entire generations to migrate in search of jobs; left behind are the elderly, who often care for grandchildren when their parents depart. "You can't make a living here anymore," says José Tomás Aplicano, who is 76 and a lifelong resident of Apacilagua, a village in southern Honduras. Aplicano has watched as countless neighbors, and his own children, moved away. His youngest daughter, Maryori, is the last to stay behind, but he knows she will leave as soon as she finishes high school. "She has to look for another environment to see if she finds work to survive," he says.

Many head north; U.S. Customs and Border Patrol data shows that migration from the Dry Corridor has spiked over the past few years. Some spend seasons harvesting coffee or sugar cane in less affected areas of the country. Others move to the city, lured by the prospect of a factory job with steady pay. →

↓ "Who's going to decide to come live in this place and suffer thirst and hunger?" says José Tomás Aplicano. "We are going to die here dry."

→ The old water line of a creek in Apacilagua. "Now we have to bring water with the mule," says Aplicano.





↓ Cindy Lazo before her shift at a garment factory in Villanueva, an industrial hub of the country. Cindy and her sister, Lesby, are two of eight siblings who migrated from their village in southern Honduras to find work. The sisters now earn about $275 a month each, sending a portion to their parents, who are subsistence farmers.

↓ "It gets worse here every day because it doesn't rain," says Maribel Cruz Ortiz, who lives in the village of Langue. When her daughter, Grismaldi Rodriguez, was a year old, Ortiz's husband moved to the U.S. after farming became unsustainable. The distance proved too much, and the marriage dissolved. Ortiz now supports her family by cultivating corn, squash, and beans. "You plant two crops, but you lose one," she says.

← Crop loss in the Dry Corridor includes sorghum, millet, and other grains used to feed livestock.

↓ William Trochez (*seated, left*) has spent the past five years working in a garment factory in Villanueva after droughts pushed him and his family out of their village. They've now earned enough to build a new home.

“She’s missing.

It was Father’s Day weekend last year when Betsy ran away from home. She lived with her family on the outskirts of Anchorage, right at the thin blurred line where the city meets the Alaska wilderness. On a Friday in June, at about 5 p.m., Betsy was seen heading into the woods. She’s been missing ever since. Betsy’s disappearance made the local paper and then hit national news. Search parties were organized. The Anchorage Police Department commissioned thermal-sensor drones to sweep part of the 4,000-acre park where she was last seen. The community came together to help look for her: Mountain bikers, skiers, and hikers who use the park kept an eye out for any sign of her whereabouts.

Betsy is not, as most people might assume by the fuss surrounding her, a human child. She is a cow. Specifically, she is a thousand-pound black-haired Scottish Highland cross. Her owner, Frank Koloski, has been looking for her for more than a year. The way Koloski tells it, he had gotten a batch of new yearling cows for the Father’s Day junior rodeo event last year. At this point, Betsy was one in a herd of eight, penned in the back of the arena waiting to participate in various events. Just before the rodeo was about to start, a kid accidentally left the gate unlatched. Betsy backed into it and immediately took off, while the rest of her herd stayed put. “I feel like she left me on my first date,” Koloski says.

Summer ended, the days got shorter, and snow began to fall. Koloski resigned himself to the possibility that Betsy had been killed by a hunter or a bear. He also had to resign himself to the fact that a few thousand dollars’ worth of cow had walked out the door.

Then, in mid-December, a mountain biker posted a picture in the Anchorage Fat Tire Facebook group of a ghostly black cow standing in the snow, captioned: “WTF? Anyone missing a cow?!? How on earth did a cow get onto the hillside trails?” Koloski immediately recognized Betsy and later posted his number in the Facebook group and in the local paper, asking people to call or text him if they spotted her. The community responded en masse: His phone started blowing up with tips and pictures from the police department, animal control, and well-meaning residents. Koloski has gotten somewhere between 30 to 40 calls from people who claim to have seen her.

Eric Parsons was one of the first bikers to run into Betsy, before any pictures of her had been snapped and she’d become a local phenomenon. He tells me that he was speeding down a trail in the middle of a dark winter day when he came within 4 feet of running into her. For a split second, he thought Betsy was a bear or a moose, until she reared up and mooed. “It was very much like, *That is a cow*. There’s no doubt in my mind. It’s not a bear. It’s not a moose. It’s a giant cow,” he tells me.

He rode home in disbelief and posted on Facebook, “I did not think I could hallucinate on a sub 2 hr ride. But did anyone else happen to see a black COW last night near the Campbell Creek science center?” Many people in the comments joked that he was in fact hallucinating. “But then other people started seeing the cow, too,” Parsons says. He began to bring his camera with him on rides.

Ryan Marlow, one of the people commissioned by the police to search for Betsy by drone, tells me that when he first got the call, he thought it was a joke. “I had never used a thermal camera to search for a cow,” Marlow says. “I didn’t know what a heat signature of a cow looked like, how to calibrate it. It was a best guess for all of our tech.” They ended up finding 30 skiers, ten dogs, and what they believed to be a moose, but no cow.

Betsy fits into a long history of escaped animals (some of which have also involved cows). In 2002, a cow escaped from a slaughterhouse in Cincinnati and was on the run for 11 days to the delight of the city’s residents. She was eventually renamed Cincinnati Freedom and awarded a key to the city, which she was too nervous to receive because she was a cow. As far back as 1935, *The New York Times* covered in great detail the escape of 150 rhesus monkeys from a zoo, writing that “the alleged leader was unanimously selected as having been an agile creature called Capone, who might have been suspected because of his name, but apparently wasn’t.”

In 2015, the whole country stopped what it was doing to watch live footage of two llamas on the loose in Arizona. As one newscaster perhaps best summed up the event: “Why are we doing this, you might ask? Well, because we have live pictures of llamas. What would you do? We got through the ISIS stuff, and there are other things, and we’ll make

The long, loving search for Betsy, bovine escape artist

By Clio Chang

Photographs by Ash Adams

Illustrations by Alix Pentecost Farren

I’n

time for them. We'll kill the commercials if we have to, and for now we watch llamas."

In the months following Betsy's disappearance, as the story of her escape continued to spread, her reputation rose to folk-heroine levels. She has a Facebook group, where hundreds consistently follow up on her whereabouts. One man, Tom Hewitt, published an ode to Betsy in the *Anchorage Daily News*, writing, "You haven't seen the inside of four walls since just after the summer solstice; I can't even see the sky from the room where I'm writing this." I ask Hewitt what he saw in Betsy. "I moved here to Anchorage relatively recently from Fairbanks, which is a smaller city," he says. "It took me a while to find my feet here. I just wasn't feeling quite at home. Something about this cow — that was also striking out on her own in the middle of the wilderness, making a life on her own — really resonated with me, and I think a lot of other people, too."

Koloski tells me that one woman in Mississippi called him in the middle of the night just to say that she had read about Betsy and was following her story. She wanted to tell him something funny she realized: that his last name sounds like "cow, lost, ski." →

not going to quit her."

If you had to come up with a name for a cow, Betsy would probably be one of the first to spring to mind. It's bovine *classique*: the Jessica of human girl names in the 1990s. Which is why I was surprised to find out that one of the most famous cows in Alaska — and maybe the nation, maybe even the world, depending on whom you ask — was named basic, generic Betsy.

When I meet the other cows at Koloski's ranch, whose names seem to drip with personality — Blue Bayou, Bubba Gump — the dichotomy of Betsy's moniker is made even clearer. I ask Koloski how she ended up with it, and he tells me he had been put on the spot to come up with her name during a news interview. He regrets the decision. If he could do it over again, he would have named her Lucille, so he could sing country songs to her. The Waylon Jennings one is his favorite: "Well, I woke up this morning / Lucille was not in sight / Asked my friends about her, but all their lips were tight / Lucille."

Koloski usually purchases his bulls by evaluating their weight and breeding quality. But when it comes to the yearling cows like Betsy, which are used specifically for junior rodeo events because they are smaller, Koloski rounds them up from a ranch and returns them after the season ends (he won't disclose the location of the ranch because its owner wants to "stay out of the limelight"). Koloski essentially gets whatever he can catch. There's no methodology beyond that. By the end of the season, he swears that Betsy would have known who her herd was and where her food was coming from. She would never have wanted to run away.

It's clear that Betsy's well-being out in the wilderness weighs on Koloski's sense of rodeo responsibility. "I just think that the reputation of anybody losing a cow or an animal, it's painful no matter how you look at it," he tells me. He motions toward the massive bulls that are pawing the ground in front of us and says that sometimes he'll "kick it back" and lie on Blue Bayou's belly. He cherishes those moments. "To show your own emotion toward an animal that is so majestic and outweighs you by so much — and that animal is being so vulnerable to allow you to do that. That trust right there, phew, it's awesome."

Koloski has been around cows all his life — he competed in bull riding since childhood and moved from Florida to Alaska in 1995, continuing to participate in local rodeos and eventually establishing Rodeo Alaska in 2010. While he has actual (human) children, he says that he also sees his cows as family: "They're all like my kids." Koloski says that when the time comes to part with his yearlings, he'll miss them. "It's going to stink. I have a family and all, but they're part of the family, too. They're providers. They're an intricate part of what I do for a living."

A few days after touring his pens, I went to Koloski's July Fourth junior rodeo in Wasilla during the week of a record-shattering heat wave. Anchorage hit 90 degrees for the first time, and Koloski was busy driving a water truck around the arena to offset the dry conditions.

Betsy was a well-known entity at the rodeo. Many of the same people who were present were also there when she escaped last year. "I've been around cows pretty much most of my life, and she is the only cow I know that doesn't want to be in a herd," Elise O'Loughlin, a rodeo attendee, tells me. "They'll take off, but they always come back." The rodeo opened with an exuberant announcer introducing the crowd to "two beautiful ladies" (the flag and Miss Rodeo Alaska) and encouraging audience members to "make a new friend." The event that

Betsy would have participated in, steer riding, which is supposedly an easier version of bull riding for children, came at the end of the night.

As the event was about to begin, I wandered into the back of the arena, which had been constructed into a maze of pens and gates that somehow ended up directing each of the cows into its own tight chute. The narrow passageways were a far cry from the ranch that Betsy had come from and the thousands of acres she roams now.

One cow got confused and slammed into one of the gates, coming out the other side with a bloody nose. The cows were shuffled from pen to pen throughout the night, forever moving from one cage to another.

Alaska is not known for its cows — there are only two states in the country, Delaware and Rhode Island, that have fewer cattle, and they are both significantly smaller. Milan Shipka, a professor of animal science at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, tells me that this has mainly to do with the lack of market and infrastructure for the industry. He also notes that any feed that isn't grown in Alaska, like corn, needs to be imported, which can be expensive. "Our cattle industry is small. We have about as much reindeer production as we do cattle," Shipka says. Which means that seeing a cow, even on a farm, is rare; seeing one in the wilderness is unheard of.

Koloski and I are walking around Hillside Park when he crouches under the spruce trees and grabs a fistful of the grassy foliage growing underneath. He's speculating how Betsy has been on the loose for more than a year now, surviving a full Alaskan winter. "This doesn't get covered like you would think from the snowfall," he says. "This is all brown foliage." The reason Koloski believes that Betsy has been spotted, and frequently, during winter is that the snow tends to push most animals down to lower land to find uncovered grasses. He gestures to the woods around us, saying, "There's plenty here." He points out Campbell Creek rushing past us, frigid and crisp, telling me that it doesn't freeze over in the winter, so Betsy also has water.

Koloski is less concerned that Betsy will succumb to cold or starvation. The real threat to their reunion is Betsy herself. Her running speed is faster than a human's, but slower than a bear's. And without the specialized knowledge about how to round up and rope a cow, the general population of Alaska — which consists of few ranchers, unlike cattle-heavy states like Montana or Wyoming — has little chance. Even those in the rodeo circuit acknowledge it would be difficult to rope Betsy if she was in the woods. "There's no way you're going to swing a rope. You're going to hit a tree," says Trevor Davis, who runs the music at the rodeo. "If it were on a straightaway plane, sure, we could throw horses on her and just rope her down."

Charlie Willis, who owns a roping arena in Wasilla and sells tack and apparel from a trailer outside the rodeo, puts it to me this way: "They'll never catch her. Unless she just happens to wander into someone's garage and they shut the door."

If Koloski didn't have much of an opinion about Betsy before she ran away, he certainly does now. He tells me that he thinks she is starting to enjoy the attention. "If she has a personality, she probably thinks she's the s---," Koloski says fondly. One of the first times he got a tip about Betsy was from people who saw her while working on the ski slopes at Hilltop. When Koloski arrived, it was dark out, so he did what any normal person would: He began to moo. "And by gosh, she called back," Koloski says. He walked around looking for her, with the two of them mooing back and forth at each other in the dark. But Koloski never caught a glimpse of her.

The only time Koloski has seen Betsy since she escaped was when his friend, a police officer, called him at 2 a.m. He jumped out of bed and drove his truck down to the corner of Elmore and Martin Luther King, where Betsy had been spotted. Right as Koloski turned onto the road, he saw Betsy disappear into the woods.

His police officer friend called with an update: Betsy had moved onto East Tudor Road a block away. Koloski ran there, but all that was left were footprints in the snow leading up to a government building. "I'm standing there looking, and I could tell her breath was fresh right on the door," Koloski says. "I took my finger and wiped her breath smudge. I was like, *You gotta be kidding me.*"

Koloski feels he owes a lot to the community for turning out to help him; it's part of the reason why he hasn't given up looking for her. If he were to get Betsy back, he's already planned to throw a barbecue for the Fat Tire bike group and the rest of the public. "I would foot the bill

on that in a minute," Koloski says. He would corral Betsy and have her attend the party, too.

As we trudge around the wooded paradise that Betsy now inhabits, I keep my eye out for her, as if I'll have more luck in ten minutes than Koloski has had over the past year. I ask him if he'll ever stop looking for Betsy. "She's missing. I'm not going to quit her," Koloski says. "Somebody calls me, just like I have been, countless hours, days, nights, when I get the call to go and look for her. I never would stop doing that."

A man passes us on the trail, walking what seems like a dozen dogs. Koloski asks, "If y'all see Betsy, let me know." It's unclear whether he's talking to the man, the dogs, or some higher power — but no one answers.

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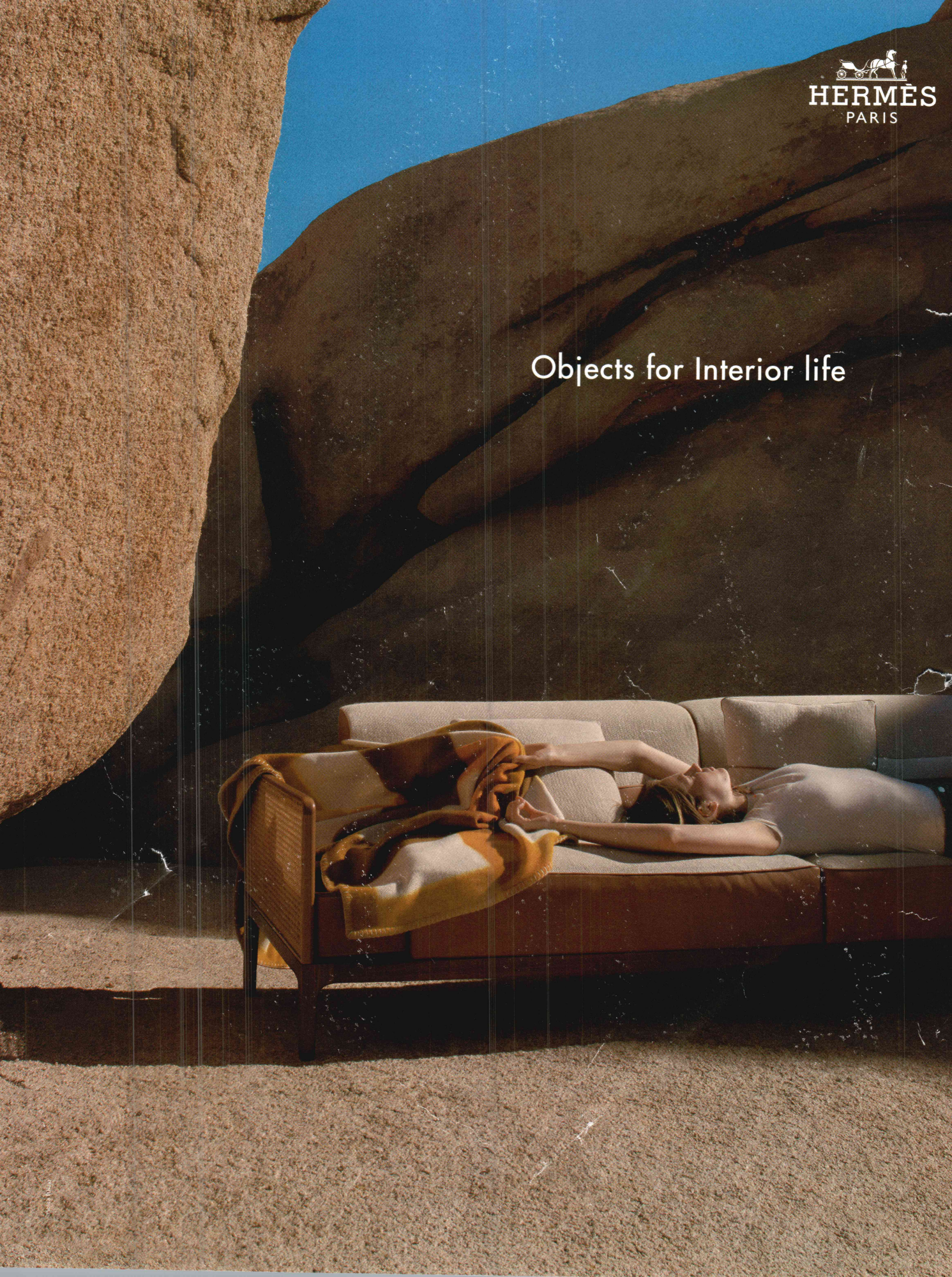
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